

All the Young Dudes

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All the Young Dudes

by [MsKingBean89](#)

Summary

LONG fic charting the marauders' time at Hogwarts (and beyond) from Remus' PoV - diversion from canon in that Remus's father died and he was raised in a children's home, and is a bit rough around the edges. Otherwise canon-compliant.
1971 - 1995

This IS a wolfstar fic, but incredibly slow burn. Literally years. Long build up but worth it I promise!

PLEASE DO NOT COPY TO WATTPAD. SERIOUSLY, WHY??

Spotify playlist:

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(Compiled by amazing reader, JustAnotherPerson)

DISCLAIMER: I do not support JK Rowling's disgusting transphobic views.

NOTE: I AM NO LONGER READING OR REPLYING TO COMMENTS ON THIS FIC

Notes

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Translations welcome.

Summer, 1971: St Edmund's

Saturday 7th August, 1971

He woke up in the dark. It was too hot in the little room they'd put him in, being early August. Though he supposed that could be the fever. He always had a high temperature, the morning after. They used to put him in a room with a window, but a few months ago he'd been able to smash one of them, and if it hadn't had bars anyway then he'd have escaped. He'd heard them talking about restraining him as he got older. He tried not to think about it.

He remembered the feeling of hunger, so intense it transformed into rage. He remembered howling and keening for hours, circling the cell over and over again. Perhaps they'd let him off lessons today, and he could sleep. It was the summer holiday's anyway, and not fair that he had to do lessons when all the other boys were allowed to spend all day dossing about, playing football or watching telly. Sitting up, he stretched carefully, paying attention to every ache and pop of his joints. There was a fresh claw mark behind his left ear, and a deep bite in his right thigh.

He rubbed his hand over his scalp, where his hair was shaved very close to his head and bristled against his fingers. He hated it, but every boy at the children's home had the same severe buzz cut. It meant that when they were allowed out in town on weekends everyone knew they were St. Edmund's boys – which was probably the point. The shopkeepers knew who to look out for. Not that the boys themselves did anything to subvert expectations. They had been told so often that they were the dregs of society; left behind and unwanted – so why not cause a little havoc?

Remus heard footsteps at the end of the hall. It was Matron; he could smell her, hear her heartbeat. His senses were always amplified after one of his episodes. He stood up, pulling a blanket around himself despite the heat, and padded towards the door to listen harder. She was not alone, there was a man with her. He smelled old and somehow... different. A thick, iron scent which reminded Remus vaguely of his father. It was magic.

"Are you sure it's worth your time?" Matron was asking the stranger, "He's really one of our worst cases."

"Oh yes," The old man replied. His voice was rich and warm like chocolate. "We're very sure. Is this where you keep him during...?"

"His episodes." The matron finished in her clipped, nasal voice. "For his own safety. He's started biting, since his last birthday."

"I see." The man replied, sounding thoughtful, rather than concerned. "May I ask, madam, what it is you know about the young man's affliction?"

"Everything I need to know." Matron replied, coldly. "He's been here since he was five. And he's always been trouble – not just because he's one of your sort."

"My sort?" The man replied, calm and unperturbed. Matron lowered her voice almost to a whisper, but Remus could still hear.

"My brother was one. Haven't seen him in years of course, but he occasionally asks me favours. St Edmund's is a very special institution. We're equipped for problem cases." Remus heard the jangle of keys, "Now, you must let me see him first. He often needs patching up. I don't know why you wanted to see him after a full moon in the first place, if you already knew."

The old man did not reply, and Matron walked towards Remus' room, her patent leather heels clicking on the stone floor. She knocked on the door three times.

"Lupin? Are you awake?"

"Yeah." He replied, pulling his blanket tighter. They took his clothes off him to stop them getting torn.

"Yes, Matron." Matron corrected him, through the door.

"Yes, Matron." Remus muttered, as the key turned in the lock and creaked open. The door was plain wood, and he knew he could easily smash it during an episode, but it had been fitted with silver plating after the window incident. Just the smell of it made him feel queasy and headachy. The door opened. Light poured in like water and he blinked wildly. As Matron entered the room he automatically took a step back.

She was a birdlike, pointy sort of woman, with a long thin nose and dark beady eyes. She regarded him warily.

"Need any bandages, this time?"

He showed her his wounds. They weren't bleeding any more, he'd noticed that the injuries he inflicted upon himself, though deep, healed faster than any other cuts and scrapes; he never even needed stitches. The scars never faded, however, and left silvery slash marks across his body. Matron knelt before him, dabbing him with antiseptic and wrapping him in itchy gauze. This done, she handed him his clothes and he dressed quickly in front of her.

"You've a visitor." She said, finally, as he pulled his t-shirt over his head. It was grey, like all of their clothes.

"Who?" He asked, looking her in the eye because he knew she didn't like it.

"A teacher. He's here to talk to you about school."

"Don't want to." He replied. He hated school. "Tell him to get lost."

Matron clipped him around the ear. He'd expected it, and didn't flinch.

"Less of the lip." She snapped. "You'll do as you're told or I'll leave you in here for the rest of the day. Come on, now." She grabbed his arms and pulled him forward.

He scowled, thought about fighting her off, but there was no point. She really might lock in him again, and he was curious about the stranger now. Especially as the scent of magic grew stronger as they moved down the shadowy corridor.

The man waiting for them was quite tall and dressed in the strangest suit Remus has ever seen. It was velvet, a deep maroon colour with elaborate gold embroidery at the cuffs and lapels. His tie was midnight blue. He must have been very old indeed – his hair was white as snow, and he had an incredible long beard which must have reached his navel. Strange as he looked, Remus didn't feel intimidated, as he did with most grownups. The man had kind eyes, and smiled at Remus from behind half-moon spectacles as they approached. He extended a hand,

"Mr Lupin," The old man said, warmly, "A pleasure to meet you."

Remus stared, entranced. No one had ever addressed him with such respect before. He felt almost

embarrassed. He shook the man's hand, feeling a an electric burn as he did so, like battery acid.

"Hi." He replied, staring.

"I am Professor Dumbledore. I wonder if you would join me in a turn about the grounds? It's such a lovely day out."

Remus glanced up at Matron, who nodded. This in itself was worth having to talk about school with an oddly dressed stranger – she never let him outside during a full moon, not even with supervision.

They carried on down a few more corridors, just the two of them. Remus was sure he'd never seen Dumbledore at St Edmund's before, but he certainly seemed to know his way around. Once they were finally outside, Remus breathed deeply, the warm summer sunlight washing over him. The 'grounds', as Dumbledore had called them, were not extensive. A patch of yellowing grass the boys used for football and a small patio terrace with weeds growing up through the cracks in the crazy paving.

"How are you feeling, Mr Lupin?" The old man asked. Remus shrugged. He felt the same way he always did afterwards. Sore and restless. Dumbledore didn't snap at him for insolence, merely continued to smile down at him as they walked slowly around the perimeter fence.

"What d'you want?" Remus finally asked, kicking a stone out of his way.

"I suspect you already have some idea," Dumbledore replied. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a brown paper bag. Remus could smell sherbet lemon, and sure enough, Dumbledore offered him a sweet. He took it and sucked.

"You're magic." He said, plainly. "Like my dad."

"Do you remember your father, Remus?"

He shrugged again. He didn't very well. All his memory could ever drag up was the shape of a tall, skinny man wearing a long cloak, looming over him, crying. He assumed that had been the night he was bitten. He remembered that, well enough.

"He was magic." Remus said. "He could make stuff happen. Mum was normal."

Dumbledore smiled at him, kindly.

"Is that what your Matron has told you?"

"Some of it. Some of it I knew. He's dead, anyway, topped himself."

Dumbledore looked slightly taken aback by this, which pleased Remus. It was a point of pride, having a tragic backstory. He didn't think about his father often, other than to consider whether he would have killed himself if Remus hadn't been bitten. He carried on.

"Mum's not dead though. Just didn't want me. So I'm here." He looked around. Dumbledore had stopped walking. They were at the furthest edge of the grounds now, by the tall back fence. There was a loose board there which no one knew about. Remus could slip through it if he wanted to, and get onto the main road into town. He never really went anywhere in particular; just wandered around waiting for the police to pick him up and bring him back. It was better than doing nothing.

"Do you like it here?" Dumbledore was asking. Remus snorted,

“Course I bloody don’t.” He side-eyed Dumbledore, but didn’t get in trouble for swearing.

“No, I didn’t think so.” The old man observed, “I hear you’re something of a troublemaker, is that right?”

“Ain’t any worse than the others.” Remus said. “We’re ‘troubled boys’.”

“Yes, I see.” Dumbledore stroked his beard as if Remus has said something of extreme significance.

“Got another sweet?” Remus held out a hand expectantly. Dumbledore handed him the bag and he couldn’t believe his luck. The old fool was a complete pushover. He chewed the lozenge this time, feeling it crunch like glass between his teeth, sherbet exploding on his tongue like fireworks.

“I run a school, you know. The same school your father went to.”

That threw Remus for a loop. He swallowed the sweet and scratched his head. Dumbledore continued.

“It’s a very special sort of school. For wizards, like me. And like you. Would you like to learn magic, Remus?”

Remus shook his head, fervently.

“I’m too thick.” He said, firmly, “I won’t get in.”

“I’m sure that’s not true at all.”

“Ask her,” Remus jerked his head back towards the tall grey building where Matron lay in wait. “Can’t hardly read, even. I’m stupid.”

Dumbledore looked at him for a very long time.

“You haven’t had a very easy start in life, Mr Lupin, and I’m sorry about that. I knew your father – only a little – and I’m sure he wouldn’t have wanted... anyway. I am here to offer you something different. A place among your own kind. Perhaps even a way to channel all of this anger you have.”

Remus stared at him. What difference did it make, if he was in one home or another? Matron never gave him sweets, and didn’t smell like magic. The kids at Dumbledore’s school couldn’t be worse than the St Edmund’s boys, and if they were then at least he could hold his own in a fight, now. But. There was always a ‘but’.

“What about my episodes?” He asked, folding his arms. “I’m dangerous, y’know.”

“Yes, Remus, I know,” Dumbledore replied, sadly. He placed a hand on Remus’ shoulder, very gently. “We’ll see what we can come up with. Leave it with me.”

Remus shook him off and chewed on another sherbet lemon. They walked back to the building in silence, both satisfied that they understood each other now.

First Year: The Hogwarts Express

Chapter Summary

Remus meets the Marauders.

Remus rubbed his scalp again, then his nose, which kept running. It had been bothering him since dinner the evening before, when another boy had punched him. To be fair, Remus had kicked him first. But the boy – Malcolm White – was fourteen and twice the size of eleven-year-old Remus. Malcolm had made some crack about Remus going to a special school for backwards kids, and he'd had to retaliate. He had a black eye now, which he regretted. Everyone at the new school would think he was a yob. But then, he supposed he was a yob.

Matron slapped his hand away from his head and he scowled up at her. They stood in the huge ticket hall at King's Cross staring at two platform numbers. There was number nine, then number ten. Matron looked at the letter in her hand again.

"For goodness sake." She muttered.

"We have to run at the barriers." Remus said, "I told you."

"Don't be ridiculous." Matron said, "I'm not running at anything."

"I'll go, then. Leave me here."

Remus had only half believed Dumbledore when he'd explained how to access platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. But then packages had started arriving for him, delivered by owls and containing strange books and weird clothes and all sorts of oddments like quills and parchment. Dumbledore had been unfailingly generous over the past month. He'd presented Remus with a list of things he would need for his new school, and promised to send him as much of it as he could from the second hand supplies at Hogwarts. Now Remus was willing to believe almost anything the old man said.

He'd never owned so many possessions before, and was actually glad when Matron had locked everything in her office so it wouldn't get pinched by the other boys. Now it had all been crammed into a battered old charity shop suitcase which he had to hold in a very particular way so it didn't fall apart.

"I'm not leaving you anywhere, Lupin. Just wait there while I find a guard." Matron clipped off towards the ticket office, her big backside wobbling as she went. Remus glanced about furtively, then licked his lips. It might be his only chance.

He ran at the barrier at full pelt, squeezing his eyes shut tight as he approached the metal turnstiles. But he didn't hit anything. The atmosphere changed, and he opened his eyes to find himself standing on a completely different platform, surrounded by people. Not people. Wizards.

The train itself was huge, gorgeous and old fashioned. 'The Hogwarts Express'. He clutched his suitcase with both hands, biting his lip. There were lots of other children, his own age and older, but they were all with their families, some of them crying as they were hugged and kissed by protective mothers. He felt very small and very alone, and thought it best to just hurry up and get

on the train.

Inside he couldn't reach the luggage rack to stow away his things, so he chose an empty carriage and sat the suitcase on the seat beside him. He watched the people on the platform through the window, pressing his forehead against the cold glass. He wondered if they all came from wizard families too. He wondered if any of them had episodes like he did. He didn't think so – none of them seemed to have scars. A lot of them were wearing normal clothes, like he was (albeit with fewer holes and patches), but some were wearing long dark robes and tall pointed hats. Lots of the other kids had owls, or cats carried in baskets. He even saw one girl with a tiny lizard perched on her shoulder.

Remus was starting to feel even more nervous, his stomach roiling as he realised that despite everything Dumbledore had said about being among his 'own kind', he would be just as out of place at Hogwarts as he was everywhere else.

Just then, he realised that someone was staring back at him from the platform. It was another boy, his own age. He was tall and slim, but not skinny like Remus. He had dark hair, much longer than any other boy he'd ever seen, curling gracefully to his shoulders. He had fine high cheekbones, a full mouth and startling blue eyes. Seeing Remus staring, the other boy arched one perfect eyebrow in a gesture that clearly said: 'and what are *you* looking at?'

Remus stuck his tongue under his bottom lip so that his chin bulged, pulling an ugly face. The other boy smirked, slightly, then threw up two fingers at him. Remus almost laughed.

"Sirius, what do you think you are *doing*?! Come here at once." A rather severe looking witch with the same angular eyebrows as the boy stepped into view, yanking her son away from the window. The boy rolled his eyes but obeyed, and they disappeared further up the platform.

Remus sat back in the beaten leather seat and sighed. He was getting hungry, he hoped the journey wasn't too long. Matron had packed him two dry cheese and pickle sandwiches and an apple, but he didn't fancy them much.

After a few more minutes, the door to his compartment burst open, and a girl came rushing in. She ignored Remus, flying to the window, pressing her hands against the glass and waving frantically at her family standing on the platform. She was small and pale, with bright red hair pulled back in a tight plait. Her face was blotchy from crying.

She kept waving as the train drew away, and her parents waved back, blowing kisses. A sour faced girl stood beside them, her arms folded. Once the train had completely left the station, the red haired girl sat down opposite Remus, sighing deeply. She looked at him with huge green eyes, glistening with tears.

"It's so horrid saying goodbye, isn't it?" She had a high, middle class accent.

"Uh, yeah, I s'pose." Remus nodded, self-conscious. He didn't really like girls. St Eddy's was single -sex, and the only contact he had with women was the Matron and the school nurse – they were both mean old bitches. The girl was looking at him curiously.

"Are you from a muggle family, too? My name's Lily."

"Remus," he replied, awkwardly, "My dad was a wizard, but I didn't know him... well I grew up with muggles."

"I couldn't believe it when I got my letter," she smiled, warmly, cheering up, "But I can't wait to

see what it's like, can you?"

Remus couldn't think how to answer her – but he didn't have to. The door slid open once more and a boy poked his head in. He had long black hair, like the boy Remus had pulled faces at, but it was poker straight. He had a long nose and wore a deep frown.

"There you are, Lily, I've been looking ages." He said, giving Remus a dirty look, the sort Remus was quite used to.

"Sev!" Lily jumped out of her seat and threw her arms around the other boy, "I'm so glad to see you!"

He patted her shoulder, shyly, his cheeks slightly pink.

"Come and sit in my carriage, there's plenty of room."

"Oh..." Lily looked back, "Can Remus come? He's all by himself."

"I'm not sure," The other boy, Sev, looked Remus up and down, taking him in piece by piece. The thuggish haircut, the fraying jeans, the worn out t-shirt, the second hand suitcase. "There might not be *that* much room."

Remus slouched down in his seat, propping his feet up on the bench opposite.

"Get lost then. I don't want to go to your stupid carriage." He looked out of the window, purposefully.

Lily and the other boy left. Remus let his feet drop back to the floor. He sighed. It was noisy, outside his little compartment. He could hear shrieking and laughter and owls hooting and a few younger students still crying. Once again, he found himself locked away from everyone else. He was starting to wonder if that was just his lot in life. Perhaps once he got to this Hogwarts place they'd force him to sleep in a cell all by himself too.

There was a sudden rap at the door – a short, cheerful tune – and it opened once more. Remus slouched even further down in his seat, as a friendly faced boy with a mess of dark hair and large round glasses entered, grinning.

"Hiya," He held out a hand to Remus, "First year? Me too, I'm James." He nodded his head back to a short boy who had followed him in. "This is Peter."

Remus shook James' hand. It felt easy and comfortable. For the first time, the tight coil in his stomach began to unwind.

"Remus."

"Can we sit here? Everywhere else is full and Peter's getting train sick."

"Am not." Peter murmured, taking a seat opposite Remus, eyeing him warily. He did look a bit green. He rubbed his hands together in his lap and stared at the floor.

"Know what house you'll be in?" James asked Remus, directly. Remus shook his head. He didn't know anything about houses. Was that where they'd be sleeping? "What were your parents in?" James persisted. "Did they go to Hogwarts?"

Remus nodded, slowly,

“My dad did. I dunno what house though. My mum didn’t. She was nor—a muggle.”

Peter looked up suddenly,

“You’re a half blood?”

Remus shrugged helplessly.

“Shut up, Pettigrew,” James chastised the boy next to him, “As if it even matters.”

Remus was just about to ask what a half blood was, when the door opened yet again. It was the good looking boy who’d sworn at him in the station. He glanced about, furtively,

“None of you are related to me, are you?” He drawled. He had the same high, upper class accent that Peter and James had. Remus disliked them all at once, knowing that they’d think he was common – and a half blood, whatever that was.

“Don’t think so.” James replied, grinning, “James Potter.” He held out a hand again. The other boy shook it, easily,

“Oh good, a Potter. Dad told me not to talk to you.” He sat down next to Remus, grinning, “Sirius Black.”

First Year: The Sorting

Remus was fairly sure he was dreaming. Or he'd drowned getting over that awful lake and this was just his brain making things up before he died. He was standing in an enormous stone hall, the size of a cathedral. It was full of students, all dressed in identical black robes – apart from their ties – and lit by candles. Not just any candles – these candles were actually floating. He might have been able to live with that; it could be a clever trick of the light, something to do with wires. But when he looked up he almost yelled. There was no ceiling – just the vast night sky hanging above them, pendulous grey clouds and glittering stars.

No one else seemed interested, save for the red haired girl – Lily – and a few other kids Remus assumed must have muggle parents too. Remus had on his uniform now, and felt a little better to be dressed the same as everyone else. All of the other students sat on long banquet tables, under their house banners. James had excitedly explained the differences between each house, much to the chagrin of Sirius and Peter, both of whom were convinced they'd end up in the wrong place. Remus didn't know whether to be nervous or not. He couldn't see how much it would matter to him; he'd probably get kicked out after his first lesson anyway. The more time Remus spent among wizards the more he convinced himself that he couldn't actually be one.

Professor McGonagall, a thin, stern faced witch who had led all of the first years into the hall was now standing beside a stool, holding a mangy old brown hat. This was the test James had told them about. They had to put on the hat, then somehow they would each be sorted into one of the houses. Remus looked up at each of the banners. He already knew he wouldn't end up in Ravenclaw; not if you had to be clever. He didn't think much of the one with the badger – they weren't exactly exciting animals, especially compared to snakes. He liked the colour green, too, if it came down to picking a tie. But then, James and Peter had both been keen on Gryffindor, and seeing as they were the only people who'd been very friendly so far, he wouldn't mind going with them.

A boy called Simon Arnold was the first to be called forward. The hat was placed on his head, covering the top half of his face. Remus wondered if it smelled as bad as it looked. Matron was always maniacal about head lice, and he hoped none of the kids who went before him had them. Simon was promptly sorted into Hufflepuff, the badger house, to tumultuous applause.

Sirius Black was the first of their group to go, and he looked positively queasy as he approached the stool. There was some catcalling from the Slytherin table – some of the older students were calling out to him. Two young women with masses of dark curls and the same high cheekbones and full lips at Sirius, who was now trembling on the stool. The hall was quiet for a few moments as the hat came to rest on Black's head. Then the hat screeched,

“Gryffindor!”

A few moments of stunned silence before the clapping came this time. McGonagall gently lifted the hat from Sirius' head and gave him a small, rare smile. He looked completely horrified, casting a desperate look at the Slytherin table, where the two girls heckling him were hissing, eyes narrowed. He got up and walked slowly over to the Gryffindors, where he was the first new student to take his place under the red and gold banners.

The sorting continued. Lily was also placed in Gryffindor, and sat grinning next to a very miserable looking Sirius. When it was finally his turn, Remus still couldn't see what all the fuss was about. He didn't much like having everyone's eyes on him as he pushed to the front, but he did his best to ignore it. He would have shoved his hands in his jeans and slouched, normally, but in his weird new uniform it wouldn't have had the same effect.

He sat on the stool, McGonagall looking down her nose at him. She reminded him a bit of Matron, and disgust rose in his throat. She lowered the hat over his eyes. Everything went dark. It didn't smell at all, and the peace and quiet was actually a bit of a relief.

"Hmmm," A soft voice spoke in his ear. It was the hat. Remus tried not to cringe as it purred quietly, "You're an odd one, aren't you? What *shall* we do with you... perhaps Ravenclaw? There's a good brain in here."

Remus flinched, feeling as if someone was playing a joke on him. Not bloody likely.

"But then," the hat considered, "You might go further... much further, if we put you in... GRYFFINDOR!"

Remus ripped the hat from his head as soon as it had sorted him, not waiting for McGonagall to remove it. He hurried over to the Gryffindor table, barely registering the cheering and clapping as he passed. He sat opposite Lily and Sirius. Lily shot him a pleased smile, but he just looked at his empty plate.

By the time the 'P's' came around, Remus had somewhat recovered and was able to watch with some interest as Peter, a small, pudgy looking boy hurried towards the sorting hat. Peter was the sort of boy who wouldn't last five minutes at St Eddy's. He had a perpetually nervous, twitchy look that other boys always singled out. Remus was surprised that James – who was the polar opposite of Peter; relaxed and self-assured, brimming with confidence – was being so kind to someone so obviously inferior.

The hat took a very long time over Peter. Even the teachers seemed to be getting nervous, as the minutes ticked by. Finally, he was sorted into Gryffindor, and much more quickly so was James, who strode over to the table with a huge grin on his face.

"How great is that!" He addressed the three other boys, "We all made it!"

Sirius groaned, his head in his arms on the table.

"Speak for yourself," He replied, slightly muffled, "My Father's going to kill me."

"I can't believe it." Peter kept saying, eyes wide. Though he'd clearly got what he wanted, he kept wringing his hands and shooting looks over his shoulder as if someone might come over at any moment and ask him to try again.

McGonagall did come over, but she placed a bony hand on Remus' shoulder.

"Mr Lupin," she said, quietly, but not so quietly that the other boys couldn't hear, "If you would come to my office after dinner? It's next to the Gryffindor common room, one of the prefects can show you."

Remus nodded, mute, and she left.

"What was that about?" James asked, "McGonagall wants to see you already?"

Even Sirius looked up now, curious. Remus shrugged, as if he didn't care either way. He knew what they were thinking – the rough kid was already in trouble. Sirius was looking at his black eye again. Fortunately, the food had appeared, distracting everyone. And it really had 'appeared' – the previously empty places were suddenly laden with an actual feast. Golden roasted chickens, piles of crispy roast potatoes, plates of steaming carrots, peas swimming in butter, and an enormous jug of rich dark gravy. If the food was going to be like this all the time, then Remus wondered if he

could ignore talking hats and snobbish house mates.

He paid very close attention as one of the Gryffindor prefects, who introduced himself as Frank Longbottom, led the first years to their common room in one of the towers. Remus hated getting lost, and tried hard to cement the journey into his mind as they went. He made a mental note of the size and shape of every door they entered, each portrait they passed, and which staircases moved. He was so tired and full of good food that the moving portraits and staircases no longer seemed out of place.

Once they reached the right corridor, Remus saw McGonagall's office, marked with a neat brass plaque, and decided to get the meeting over with. He paused outside the door and was just about to knock when James appeared,

"Want us to wait for you, mate?"

"Why?" Remus asked, eyeing the dark haired boy suspiciously. James shrugged,

"So you don't end up on your own."

Remus stared at him for a moment, before slowly shaking his head,

"No. I'm fine." He knocked.

"Enter." A voice came from within. Remus pushed open the door. The office was small, with a neat little fireplace and rows of books against one wall. McGonagall sat behind an immaculately tidy desk. She smiled thinly and motioned for Remus to sit down in the chair opposite. He did, sniffing and rubbing his nose.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Mr Lupin." The teacher said in a reedy Scottish accent. Her hair was grey, pulled back in a severe bun, and she wore deep green robes secured with a golden clasp shaped like a lion's head. "I'm even more pleased to have you in Gryffindor house – of which I am the head."

Remus didn't say anything.

"Your father was in Ravenclaw, you know."

Remus shrugged. McGonagall pursed her lips.

"I thought it best to speak with you as soon as possible about your... condition." She said, quietly, "Dumbledore has explained that you have had minimal interaction with the wizarding world so far, and I feel it is my duty to let you know that people with your particular problem face a huge amount of stigma. Do you know what 'stigma' means?"

Remus nodded. He couldn't spell it, but he knew the word well enough.

"I want you to know that as long as you are in my house, I will not tolerate anyone treating you differently or unkindly. This applies to all of the students under my care. However," She cleared her throat, "It may be prudent for you to exercise caution."

"I wasn't going to tell anyone." Remus replied, "As if I want anyone knowing."

"Well, quite." McGonagall nodded, looking at him curiously. "That brings me to my next point. Arrangements have been made for the full moon – which next occurs this Sunday, I believe. If you could report to me after dinner, I shall show you where to go. Perhaps you could tell your friends

that you're visiting someone at home?"

Remus snorted. He rubbed the back of his head,

"Can I go now?"

The professor nodded, frowning slightly.

Outside, Remus found James still standing there, alone, waiting for him.

"Told you I'd be ok." Remus said, annoyed. James just smiled,

"Yeah, but you missed Longbottom giving us the password. Didn't want you stuck out here all night. C'mon."

James led him to the end of the corridor, where hung a large painting of a voluptuous woman wearing pink.

"Widdershins." James said, and the portrait moved away, swinging out like a door. They entered the common room.

There had been a rec room at St Edmund's Boys Reformatory, but it was nothing like this. That room had been sparsely decorated, containing a black and white, too small TV and a few board games. The decks of cards were always incomplete, and most of the chairs were broken or damaged.

The Gryffindor common room was warm, comfortable and cosy. There were huge squashy looking sofas and armchairs, a thick maroon rug in front of the blazing fire, and even more paintings adorning the walls.

"We're up here," James said, leading Remus to a winding staircase in one corner. At the top, there was another door which opened into a bedroom. Again, this was nothing like the facilities at St Edmunds. There were four beds, all enormous, hung with thick red velvet curtains with gold trim tassels. There was another fireplace, and each boy had a heavy mahogany trunk and set of shelves by their beds. Remus saw his sad little suitcase propped up against one of the trunks. He moved over, assuming that was his bed.

Peter was rifling through his own things, pulling out clothes and magazines and books, making a terrible mess.

"I can't find my wand," he wailed. "Mum made me pack it so I wouldn't lose it on the train, but it's not here!"

"Pete," James grinned, "Your mum asked me to look after it, remember?"

James and Peter, Remus had learnt since the train, had grown up as neighbours and knew each other quite well. Though two boys couldn't be any more different, and Remus still didn't understand why James didn't want to beat the shit out of Peter.

Sirius was sitting on his bed, his trunk still packed.

"Cheer up, mate," James said, going to sit next to him, "You didn't want to be in Slytherin anyway, did you?"

"Five hundred years." Sirius replied, stonily, "Every Black at Hogwarts has been sorted into

Slytherin for five hundred years.”

“Well, it’s about time someone tried to be different, eh?” James slapped him on the back jovially.

Remus opened his trunk. Inside there was a large pewter cauldron – another item Dumbledore had scrounged up from the second hand bin, he imagined. There was also a long thin box at the bottom, with a note on top.

He unfolded the note and stared at the elaborate swirly script for a long time, trying to make sense of it. He only recognised the word ‘father’, and guessed that it was also from Dumbledore, but had belonged to his father. Opening it eagerly, he found a long, polished stick. It was a wand. He hadn’t thought about wands yet, but he took it in his hand and squeezed the wood firmly. It was warm to the touch, like his own flesh, and felt supple as he turned it in his hands. It felt good.

Sirius had finally started to unpack, pulling book after book out of his trunk. Those that didn’t fit on his shelf he stacked beside his bed. James stared, having just finished pinning a poster next to his own bed. It showed a lot of little people zooming about on broomsticks, throwing balls to each other. Remus thought it looked only mildly more interesting than football, which he hated.

“You know,” James said to Sirius, still stacking books, “There is a library here.”

Sirius smirked,

“I know, but these are mostly muggle books. My Uncle Alphard left them to me, and mum would set them all on fire if I left them at home.”

Remus’ ears pricked at that. What was wrong with muggle books? Not that he had any with him. He hated reading more than anything in the world. He didn’t think about it for long, though, because now Sirius was lifting an actual record player out of his trunk, followed by a box of brand new looking records in shining bright sleeves. He went over to look straight away,

“Is that Abbey Road?!” He asked, peering into the box of vinyl.

“Yeah,” Sirius grinned, handing it to him. Remus wiped his hands carefully on his robes before taking it from him, handling it carefully. “You must be muggle born.” Sirius said, “Never met a wizard who knows the Beatles – except my cousin, Andromeda. She bought them for me.”

Remus nodded, forgetting himself for a moment,

“I love The Beatles, one of the boys in my room at home’s got at least ten singles, but he never lets me touch them.”

“Boys at home?” Sirius arched an eyebrow. Remus thought he seemed very grown up, “You mean your brother?”

“No,” Remus shook his head, handing back the record and shrinking away, “I live in a children’s home.”

“Like an orphanage?” Peter asked, wide-eyed. Remus felt anger rising, his ears growing hot.

“No.” He spat. He felt all of the boys’ eyes slide towards his bruise again and turned around to unpack the rest of his things in silence.

Eventually Potter and Black started up a conversation about something called *quidditch*, which soon became a very heated argument. Remus climbed onto his bed and drew back the curtains,

relishing the privacy. It was dark, but Remus was used to the dark.

“You’d think he’d try harder to make friends,” Peter whispered loudly to the other two boys.
“Especially if he’s muggle born.”

“Are you sure the hat wasn’t supposed to put *you* in Slytherin?” Sirius drawled. Peter was quiet after that.

First Year: Full Moon

Chapter Summary

CW - homophobic slur towards the end of the chapter.

Sunday, 5th September 1971

Remus got through the rest of the week by ignoring the other boys as much as he could. This was a technique he'd picked up at St Edmund's – it was better not to be noticed, and best if no one knew anything about you at all. (He still got the odd dead-arm or his head shoved in the bogs, but on the whole no one ever made an effort to bother him.) James, Sirius and Peter were not at all like St Eddy's boys, of course. They were what Matron would call 'well-bred'.

Sirius and James especially seemed to come from money, he could tell from the way they talked about their homes, as well as the way they spoke – every vowel and consonant clearly pronounced. Remus listened carefully and resolved to stop dropping his 'H's'.

It wasn't just their accents, but *what* they said. Remus had grown up with adults constantly telling him to 'be quiet!', and with boys who picked on you for being a swot if you said any more words than necessary. James and Sirius spoke like characters in a novel; their language full of descriptive metaphor and scathing sarcasm. Their rapid fire wit was much more intimidating than a punch in the face, Remus thought – at least that was over quickly.

He'd so far avoided the other boys by going for walks around the castle. At St Edmund's he'd had very little personal liberty, and spent much of his time locked in rooms. At Hogwarts it seemed there was nowhere you couldn't go, and Remus was determined to investigate every inch of the bizarre landscape.

They'd been provided with maps to help them find their classrooms, but Remus found his sorely lacking and overly simplified. It did not list, for example, a secret passageway he had found which led from the dungeons to the first floor girl's loos. He had no idea why on earth anyone would need to get between the two, and the first time he used it he was accosted by a particularly irritating ghost who squirted him with hand soap. It would also have been helpful, Remus reasoned, to animate the map in the same way the paintings were – then at least you could keep track of the ridiculous moving staircases. He was sure one of the rooms moved as well, it never seemed to be in quite the same place.

By the time Sunday afternoon rolled around Remus was dreading Monday, which would not only be the first day after the full moon, but the first day of lessons. After dinner – which Remus spent alone, a few seats away from Sirius, James and Peter – he made his way quickly to McGonagall's office. She was waiting for him, along with the school nurse, who he'd been introduced to already. She was a kind, pleasant sort of woman; if a little fussy.

"Good evening, Mr Lupin," McGonagall smiled, "Thank you for being so prompt. Come along."

To Remus' surprise, the two women led him not to the dungeons, as he'd thought they might, but outside the castle, towards a very large twisted tree. The whomping willow was a recent addition to the grounds – Dumbledore had explained in his speech at the beginning of the year that it had been donated by an ex-pupil. Remus thought that whoever had donated it must have really hated the school, because the tree was not only terrifying in aspect, but mindlessly violent.

As they approached, Professor McGonagall did something so incredible that Remus almost cried out in shock. She seemed to vanish – shrinking down suddenly, until she was no longer there at all. In her place was a sleek yellow eyed tabby cat. Madam Pomfrey gave no sign that she was surprised, as the cat ran forward towards the tree, which was flailing its branches like a child having a tantrum. The cat was able to run right up to the trunk of the tree, escaping injury, and pressed a paw against one of the knots in the bark. The tree fell instantly still. Remus and Madam Pomfrey continued on, walking into a hollow beneath the tree which Remus had never noticed before. Inside, McGonagall was waiting for them, a witch again.

The passageway was dimly lit by torches giving off a greenish glow, and at the very end was a door. This opened into a small cottage, which looked long abandoned. The windows were boarded up and the doors bolted.

“Here we are.” McGonagall tried to sound pleasant, though it seemed a very grim place. “Now I hope you understand that we cannot stay with you, but if you would like Madam Pomfrey to wait outside until the... transformation is complete?”

Remus shrugged.

“I'll be ok. How do I get back in the morning?”

“I'll pop by as soon as the sun rises,” Madam Pomfrey assured him. “Patch you up and have you off to your lessons before anyone even notices you're gone.” She smiled, but her eyes looked sad. It made Remus uncomfortable. But then, it was getting to that point in the evening when everything made him uncomfortable, his hair itched, his skin felt too tight, his temperature rose.

“You'd better go.” He said, quickly, retreating into the bare room. There was a little cot against one wall with clean sheets. It looked as though it had been put there for him.

The two women left, locking the door heavily behind him. He heard McGonagall muttering again and wondered what sort of spells she was placing on the house. Whatever they were, it was better than that awful silver plating.

He sat on the bed for a moment, then got up again, restless. He paced the room. Sometimes it felt as though the wolf crept into his mind before it got hold of his body, and as darkness fell outside his senses became sharper, the hot swell of hunger beginning in his belly. Remus removed his clothes quickly, not wanting to rip them. A dull throb started up in his joints and he lay down on the bed. This was the worst part. His heartbeat was thudding in his ears, and he could swear he heard his tendons creaking as they stretched, his bones and teeth grinding against each other as they elongated, his skull splitting and reshaping.

He groaned and hissed until the pain grew too much, then he screamed. He could only hope that he was far enough from the school that no one could hear him. All in all, it took about twenty minutes – though he'd never actually timed it. Things became foggy afterwards, he couldn't always remember what happened once he became the wolf. That first night at Hogwarts was a blur, and he woke up with less injuries than usual. He suspected that he had sniffed around the unfamiliar territory, testing its boundaries. He must have tried to throw himself at the doors or windows at some point, because he had a patchwork of bruises down his left side for days afterwards.

Transforming back was just as unpleasant – a crushing, tightening feeling all over which left him breathless and aching. He wiped the tears from his eyes and crawled into the cot, grateful for a quiet hour of sleep before the sun rose completely.

Madam Pomfrey returned, as promised. Speaking in soothing tones, she lay her cool hands on his fevered brow.

“I don’t like the look of you,” she said, as he opened his sleepy eyes, “It’s madness, thinking you can start a full school day like this. You’re exhausted!”

No one had ever expressed such concern for him before, and it struck him uneasily. He pushed her away, pulling on his clothes,

“I’m fine. I want to go.”

She made him drink something before letting him get up – it tasted cold and metallic, but he did feel better afterwards. He hurried up to Gryffindor tower to get his uniform on as fast as possible – he didn’t want to miss breakfast, he was famished.

“Where were you?!” James accosted him as soon as he burst into their room. The three other boys were all up and dressed, looking immaculate – apart from James’ hair, which always stuck up at the back.

“Nowhere.” Remus pushed past to get to his things.

“Are you ok?” Sirius asked, glancing away from the mirror where he was smoothing down his own hair.

“Yeah,” James added, watching Remus carefully, “You look a bit weird.”

Remus scowled at them,

“Piss off.”

“We’re just being nice.” Peter said, hands on his hips. The three of them stared at Remus, who was about to remove his t-shirt when he remembered his bruises.

“What?!” He growled at them, “You all gonna watch me get dressed? You posh boys are all a bunch of poofs.” He marched into the bathroom with his clothes and slammed the door. After a few moments he heard Peter whining that he was hungry and they all left.

First Year: Potions

Chapter Summary

Remus has a run in with Snape.

Friday 10th September 1971

By the end of his first week of lessons, Remus had lost ten house points, learnt one spell, and gained another bruise; this time on his chin.

The first few lessons were ok – they were introductory, and while Lily Evans spent each class furiously scribbling down pages and pages of notes, nobody else seemed too bothered. They were set a few simple pieces of homework, but Remus made a plan to pretend he'd forgotten to make a note of it if anyone asked.

Charms was the most exciting – the tiny professor enchanted a pile of pinecones to whiz around the room, to everyone's delight. After a few goes at the spell themselves, Lily had levitated her pinecone at least three feet in the air, and Sirius got his to spin like a top – until it got out of control and smashed a window. James, Peter and Remus had less luck, but Remus was sure his had jumped once or twice.

Transfiguration was just as interesting, but much more serious, as it was led by Professor McGonagall. There would be no practical work at all during the first week, she explained, but she would be setting lots of homework in order to gauge their ability levels.

History of magic was absolutely dire, and the less said about it the better. Remus struggled not to fall asleep as the ghostly Professor Binns floated up and down the aisles, reeling off dates and names of battles. He too set homework – two chapters of reading from the set text. Sirius rolled his eyes at this and muttered to James,

“Surely everyone's already finished ‘A History of Magic’? It's kids stuff.” James nodded, yawning. Remus felt sick. He hadn't opened even one of the books in his trunk yet, except to rip the first page from ‘Level One Potions’ to spit his chewing gum into.

He'd actually been looking forward to Potions, hoping to at least see something blow up, like in chemistry. But that turned out to involve a huge amount of reading too, and even worse, they had to share the class with the Slytherin first years. The Professor leading Potions was annoyingly cheerful and took almost half an hour just to read the register.

“Black, Sirius – aha, there you are! Quite surprised at the sorting my boy, quite surprised! I've had every one of the Blacks in my house since I started teaching! Shan't take it personally, young Sirius, but I shall be expecting great things!”

Sirius looked like he wanted the ground to swallow him up. Slughorn continued calling out names,

“A Potter and a Pettigrew, eh? Well, well, along with Mr Black here this class has quite the pedigree, eh? Let me see... Lupin! I knew your father; not one of mine, but a damn good dualist. Nasty business...”

Remus blinked. He wondered if Slughorn knew he was a werewolf. The whole class was looking at him – they knew by now that he had been raised in a children's home, and that his father was magical (Remus suspected that Peter had told them), but no one had dared ask him much more. There seemed to be another rumour going around that he was violent and possibly in a gang. He was sure that James and Sirius were encouraging it, too, though he found he didn't mind too much.

Fortunately, Slughorn wanted to get them started on practical work as soon as possible,

"Best thing is to just get stuck in!" He smiled, "Now, if we all work four to a cauldron, you can all take it in turns to follow the steps..."

Everyone clamoured to pair up – James, Sirius and Peter immediately claimed the cauldron at the very back of the room, and were joined by Nathaniel Quince, a Slytherin boy who knew Potter and Pettigrew from home. Remus decided he would just wait until everyone had grouped off then see if he could get away with just hovering at the back for the rest of the lesson.

No such luck.

"Remus! You can join us!" Lily's grabbed his wrist and pulled him over to a cauldron she was sharing with Severus Snape – her long-nosed friend Remus had met on the train – and Garrick Mulciber, a brutish, snub nosed boy who Remus was a bit afraid of.

Lily was already chattering away, laying out all of the ingredients and heating up the cauldron carefully. She was looking at Severus' book, which already had notes scribbled all over the margins.

"Here're the desiccated snail-eye stems." Lily shook a tiny jar. "I think we need quarter of an ounce..."

"You can be fairly liberal with them, Lily, they don't add much overall." Severus drawled, sounding bored.

Lily measured them out anyway and tipped them into the bubbling brew. Mulciber then took the book and stirred for five minutes, taking instruction from Severus on how fast to go and in which direction. Then it was Remus' turn. Lily gave him the book. He stared at the page. He could see that they were instructions, he could make out maybe half of the words. But every time he thought he had a grasp on it, the letters seemed to shift on the page and he was lost all over again. His cheeks grew hot and he felt slightly sick. He shrugged, looking away,

"Oh hurry *up*," Severus snapped, "It's not as if it's difficult."

"Leave him alone, Sev," Lily chided. "The book's covered in your notes, no wonder he can't find his place. Here, Remus," she flicked open her own, brand new potions book. But it was no good. Remus shrugged,

"Why don't you do it, if you're so clever." He spat at Severus.

"Oh Merlin," Severus' lips curled, "You can *read*, can't you? I mean, even muggle schools teach that, surely?"

"Severus!" Lily gasped, but the smug dark haired boy didn't have a chance to say anything else – Remus threw himself over the desk and into Severus, fists flying. He only had the element of surprise going for him – Mulciber grabbed his collar and yanked him back, punching him square in the face in three seconds flat.

“Stop!” Slughorn boomed. Everyone froze. The portly potions master stormed over, “Get up, both of you!” He shouted at the two boys on the floor. Snape and Remus climbed to their feet, chests heaving. Snape looked worse off by far, his hair ruffled and blood oozing from his nose. Remus had a rather sore chin where Mulciber had hit him, but other than a rumpled uniform he was fine.

“Explain yourselves!” Slughorn shouted. They both looked at their feet. Mulciber was grinning. Lily was crying. “Very well,” the teacher said, crossly, “Detention for both of you, two weeks. Ten points from Gryffindor and ten from Slytherin.”

“That’s not fair!” James said, suddenly from the back, “Should be twice as many from Slytherin, it was two against one!”

“From where I was standing it was Mr Lupin who started it,” Slughorn replied, but shook his head anyway, “Still, you are quite right – Mulciber, five points for punching Remus. Violence does not solve violence, you know, as I’ve told your eldest brother on a number of occasions. Miss Evans, please take Mr Snape to the hospital wing. Lupin, you can clean up the mess you’ve made.”

Remus didn’t know any cleaning spells, so he had to mop up by hand. Slughorn even made him clean Snape’s blood off the flagstones. Unfortunately, it being so soon after a full moon, the rich, iron smell of it made his stomach growl. James, Sirius and Peter were waiting for Remus outside after the lesson was finished.

“Bloody brilliant, mate,” James punched Remus lightly on the arm, “The way you just went for him!”

“Mulciber was out here bragging afterwards, told everyone what Snape said.” Sirius added, “You were right to do it – what a prat.”

“Told... *everyone*?” Remus moaned.

“Don’t worry, they’re all on your side.” James said, “Well, except the Slytherins.”

“Yeah, and who gives a toss about the Slytherins?” Sirius grinned, “C’mon, it’s dinner soon – hungry?”

“Starving,” Remus grinned back.

First Year: Revenge

“So.” James said on Sunday evening, “How are we going to get them back?”

“Get who back?” Peter asked without looking up, searching through his notes for something.

They were in the Gryffindor common room, trying to do their homework for McGonagall. Fourteen inches on the basic laws of transfiguration. Sirius and James had finished theirs, Peter was at least six inches in, and Remus hadn’t started.

“The Slytherins.” James hissed, “Keep up, Pete.”

“Not *all* of the Slytherins,” Peter asked, sounding worried, “Only Snape and Mulciber, right?”

“All of them.” Sirius confirmed. He had just appeared from under the desk they were sharing, and presented a piece of parchment, “This what you were looking for?”

“Thanks!” Peter grabbed it, relieved, “I’ve nearly finished...”

“Have you done it, Lupin?” Sirius looked over. Remus had opened his book, but hadn’t so much as looked at it. He’d considered cloistering himself away in the library one evening and trying to read it properly – he *could* read if he really, really focussed. But the opportunity hadn’t presented, and if he was honest; he just didn’t want to. Ever since the Potions lesson the four of them had become real friends, and Remus didn’t want to miss out.

“Nah,” He shrugged in response to Sirius. “Can’t be bothered.”

“Let us know if you need help.”

“You can copy mine if you want.” James pushed his across the desk. Remus pushed it back, gritting his teeth.

“I’m fine. I’m not stupid.”

“No one said you were.” James replied, casually. Sirius was looking at him, though. Remus wanted to hit him, but he was trying not to lash out so much – James and Sirius sometimes play wrestled, but they never actually tried to hurt each other, like he had with Snape. Forcing himself to swallow his temper, Remus opted instead to change the subject.

“We could put itching powder in their beds.” He offered. Someone had done that to him once. He had a rash for a full week, and on the night of the full moon had torn at his skin more than usual. “Or on their clothes... if we could figure out who does the laundry, anyway.”

This had been a matter of great concern to Remus – their dirty laundry appeared to just vanish and then resurface, cleaned and folded in their trunks. He’d never caught anyone else in their room, and couldn’t understand it at all.

“I like it.” James replied, chewing his quill, “Anyone got any itching powder, though?”

The three boys shook their heads.

“Could order some from Zonko’s.” Sirius put in. “If you let me borrow your owl, James, Mum confiscated mine after the sorting.”

"I s'pose," James replied. "Wish we could do it sooner, though. You know, strike while the iron is hot."

"Don't need to buy itching powder," Remus said, suddenly, having a brainwave, "Do you reckon they have rose hips in the greenhouse?"

"Yep," Peter spoke, head still bowed over his homework, "For healing potions – arthritis, I think."

"The hairs inside make you itch, really badly." Remus explained, excited, "Matron – the woman who runs the children's home – she grows them, and if you get in trouble she makes you seed them without gloves on." His fingertips itched just thinking about it.

"That's awful." James said.

"Good idea, though!" Sirius grinned. "Next break, we'll go and get a load of them. Then we can seed them – with gloves on – and put them in the Slytherin's bedsheets. Excellent!"

"How are we going to get into the Slytherin dorms?" Peter asked, finally finishing his work.

"Leave that to me," James smirked, mercurially.

* * *

Getting the rose hips was easy. They sent Peter, who was the only one of them who hadn't been given a detention yet, and was therefore under the least observation. Peter was small and good at going unseen; he crept into the green house unnoticed during morning break and returned red faced and gleeful, with a jar full of rose hips under his cloak.

Then they'd all locked themselves away in their shared bathroom to seed all of the buds. Under Remus' close instruction, they all wore their heavy dragon hide gloves to do this, taking extra care not to touch the seeds or fine little hairs.

"I can't wait to see the looks on their faces." Sirius was grinning, sitting cross legged on the floor next to James.

Remus watched, sitting on the edge of the bath tub, James and Sirius' two dark heads bowed over the work. He was a little bit jealous of their friendship. They had so much in common – being raised into magic, both growing up wealthy, both completely mad about quidditch. In addition, it was clear that after only three weeks James and Sirius had managed to secure a reputation as joint kings of the first years. Everyone listened to them when they spoke. Everyone laughed when they were funny. No one even got annoyed if they lost house points.

"I still don't know how we're going to get into the Slytherin dorms – even Peter isn't that sneaky." Sirius glanced at James. He'd been trying to get him to reveal his plan ever since the bespectacled boy had mentioned it.

"Let me worry about that," was all James said.

The seeds and hairs were then decanted into another jar, while the boys ended up eating the leftover rosehips over the course of the week.

It was Tuesday evening when they finally had their chance. James decided that they would have to do it before everyone went to bed. He also decided that they ought to go to the Slytherin dorms separately, to avoid being seen together and discovered. Remus personally thought this was overkill, but went along with it, not wanting to ruin the other boy's fun.

They ate dinner much more quickly than usual that evening, before getting up from the table one at a time and leaving the hall. Peter looked so nervous Remus thought he might panic at the last minute and give them all away. He made sure to stay close to the smaller boy, just in case he had to cover his mouth or pull him back at some point.

Sirius and James went first, of course, heading towards the girl's loo's on the second floor which Remus had told them led to the dungeons. He'd thought about keeping that particular passageway to himself, but as he'd already found a few other good hiding places by then he reasoned that letting them know about this one wouldn't hurt. After all, how often would he want to get to the dungeons?

The ghost who lived in the toilets was fortunately in a quiet mood, though Remus could hear her sobbing softly in the last stall.

"Lead the way then, Lupin," James gestured grandly, once Remus and Peter arrived. Sirius grabbed his arm,

"Wait, show us what you're planning, first."

James smirked that annoying grin he'd been sporting since Sunday.

"Oh... ok then, here, hold this," he thrust the jar of rosehip seeds into Sirius' hands, pulling back his robes.

He produced a very long, voluminous cloak, woven from the strangest looking fabric Remus had ever seen – silvery grey and shimmery.

"No." Sirius gaped, "You haven't, Potter, you bloody haven't..."

James was grinning so broadly now that Remus thought his face might split in two. The gangly boy winked at them all, then, with a flourish, swept the cloak over his head, so that it covered him top to toe. He vanished.

"You jammy bastard!" Sirius whooped, "How come you never told me?!"

"You never told me, either!" Peter squeaked, "And I've known you forever. Where did you get it?"

James pulled the hood of the cloak down, so that his head appeared to float in mid-air. It made Remus feel a bit queasy.

"Been in the family for years." He said, triumphantly, "Dad let me bring it, as long as I don't tell mum."

"Lucky git." Sirius said, grabbing for some of the invisible material and rubbing it between his fingers, "My parents would do *anything* for an invisibility cloak."

"I reckon we can all fit under it," James demonstrated, pulling it apart and raising his arms like a bat, "C'mon, let's all get nice and cosy..."

They all shuffled underneath the cloak, then tried waddling up and down the room a few times until they were able to walk comfortably together. Finally, trying not to giggle or whisper too much, the four invisible boys made their way to the dungeons. Remus showed them which tiles to tap in order for the floor to open up in the third stall from the left.

“How’d you find this, Remus?” James whispered, “It’s genius.”

“You come out behind one of them rugs they hang on the walls, in the dungeons,” Remus replied, “I just looked behind it.”

“Do you mean a tapestry?” Peter asked,

“Um... s’pose so?” Remus was glad none of them could see his face.

“Shut up, Pettigrew.” Sirius snapped. Remus felt a sharp kick hit the back of his ankle,

“Oi,” he hissed, kicking back twice as hard “Bugger off.”

“Sorry!” Sirius yelped, “Meant to get Pete, not you.”

“Be quiet, all of you,” James snapped, “We’re almost there.”

They waited quietly on their side of the tapestry, listening for footsteps in the corridor outside. Once James was satisfied that it was quiet, they all clambered out of the passage. The dungeons were cool, dimly lit and cavernous. There was a strange dripping sound coming from somewhere – perhaps the pipes.

“Where’s the entrance?” Sirius murmured.

“Behind that wall,” Remus pointed, hoping they could see where he was aiming. It was a plain brick wall.

“How’d you know?”

“I’ve seen them go in before,” Remus said, hurriedly. He wasn’t going to tell them that he knew there were two hundred Slytherins on the other side because the scent of their blood and their magic so strongly he could almost taste it.

“D’you know the password?”

“Nope.”

“Damn.”

“It’s not curfew yet, let’s just wait.”

So they did, rather uncomfortably. Though the corridor was dank, it was unnecessarily warm underneath the cloak, especially with all four of them so close together. Fortunately, two seventh years came hurrying through in the next few minutes. Unfortunately, Sirius knew them.

“Let’s see the ring again, Bella!” Narcissa Black pleaded with her elder sister. Remus felt Sirius stiffen, pressing himself backwards into the wall.

Bellatrix preened, extending a long, ivory arm. On her bony finger was an enormous, ugly silver and emerald engagement ring, which she’d been flashing about since the start of term. Everyone in the school knew that she would be marrying Rodolphus Lestrage, some wizard politician, as soon as she completed her NEWTs. Sirius had to go to the wedding.

Narcissa squealed when she saw it, though she’d probably seen it more than anyone else.

“Gorgeous!” She gushed, “Oh, I can’t wait to get married...”

“Wait your turn,” Bellatrix replied, with a voice like nails on a chalkboard. “Once Lucius has a better position with the ministry I’m sure Mummy and Daddy will agree to the match.”

The two young women were standing before the brick wall now. Bellatrix was the taller of the two, but they looked very alike. They had long, black curly hair – much like Sirius himself, and that same perfect Black family bone structure.

“*Mundus sanguine*,” Bellatrix announced. The wall slid aside to let them in, and the four boys hurried after, as fast as possible before it closed.

For the first time since he had been at Hogwarts, Remus was truly glad he had been placed in Gryffindor. The differences between their warm, comfortable common room and that of the Slytherin’s was stark. It was built like an enormous banquet hall, rather than a sitting room. The walls were richly decorated with yet more elegant tapestries, the fireplace was huge and ornately carved, and a ghoulish green pallor hung over everything. More than that, the place *felt* somehow wicked. Remus tried not to shudder.

The other boys seemed as uneasy as he was, and they all froze still until James prodded them forward, up a flight of stairs which they all hoped led to the boy’s dormitories. On their way they passed Severus, sitting alone in a corner, hunched over his potions textbook. At the top of the stairs, they entered the first open door which was, thankfully, a bedroom.

James threw off the cloak,

“Keep a look out, eh Petey?” He said, hurrying into the room, “Reckon one of these is Snape’s bed?”

“This one might be,” Sirius pointed, “Sheets look greasy enough.” All four boys snickered.

“Quick then, lads, gloves on,” James whispered, unscrewing the jar. Remus and Sirius pulled on a dragon hide glove each, grabbed a handful of seeds and began scattering them underneath the bedclothes.

“They’ll see them!” James said, sounding disappointed. It was true, the bright red little seeds stood out clearly against the white sheets, even in the dark.

“Well... they’ll still get it on them trying to brush them out,” Sirius offered.

“Hang on...” Remus had a sudden idea. He didn’t know how it had occurred to him, or why, but somehow he was just sure it would work. He pulled out his wand, bit his lip and waved it gingerly over the bed he had just scattered with seeds. “*Obfuscate*.” He whispered.

And just like that, the seeds were gone. Well, he knew they were still there; but no one would be able to see them now.

“Blimey!” James stared, “How’d you do that? Flitwick hasn’t taught us that charm yet, has he? Was it in the reading?”

“Nah,” Remus shrugged, “I saw some of the fifth years doing it yesterday to some sweets they bought in the village. S’not hard to copy.”

Sirius and James immediately attempted it themselves, over the seeds they had just scattered. It didn’t work the first time – or the second, but after the third, James had managed to vanish most of his.

“You’d better do it, Lupin, or we’ll be here all night.” He decided.

“Yes, please hurry up!” Peter hissed from the doorway, white with fear.

Sirius tried a few more times before giving up and letting Remus take over.

“You’re going to show me exactly how to do that as soon as we’re back on neutral territory.” He said. Remus nodded, though he wasn’t sure how to explain it. He really had just done it because he thought he probably could.

“Next room,” James announced, pulling them back to the entranceway.

“Do we have to?” Peter asked, hopping from foot to foot, “Isn’t that enough?”

“Not even close!” Sirius replied with a laugh, tossing his head, “What if we haven’t even got Snape’s bed yet? We have to get them *all*, Pete. Are you with us or not?”

“All the boys, anyway,” James said, as they entered the next bedroom, “I don’t fancy our chances getting into the girl’s – remember what happened to Dirk Creswell last week?”

They worked quickly and managed to get every single boys room. Even the last one, which had three sleeping students in it – sixth years. Even Sirius had begged off going in there, but Remus was giddy with the excitement of the prank now, and threw on the invisibility cloak to go in himself. He even scattered the rosehips over the pillows of the sleeping boys.

By the time they had finished, it was getting late and more and more Slytherin’s were heading upstairs for bed. Barely able to contain their glee, the four Gryffindor’s hid under the cloak and slowly crept back down the stairs, flattening themselves against the wall anytime someone was coming, then through the enormous stately common room and out through the wall they’d come in.

As James had instructed, they all kept as quiet as possible until they were within spitting distance of Gryffindor tower, and it was finally safe to remove the cloak once more.

“Widdershins!” They all chanted at the fat lady, who swung open for them.

It was bliss to be back in the warm, bright Gryffindor common room, and they all threw themselves into the nearest available sofa, grinning inanely at each other. Frank Longbottom called to them from his desk, where he was tidying up revision notes,

“Cutting it fine, lads, been somewhere interesting?”

Peter looked uncertain, but James just waved a hand,

“Library, obviously.”

Frank shook his head, though he was smiling,

“I’m sure I’ll hear about it soon enough.”

“I wish I could be there when it all kicks off!” Sirius whispered, his eyes shining with joy, “And I wish even more we could have got my cousins.”

“It’s just the beginning, Sirius mate,” James replied, slapping the other boy’s knee, “Between the four of us I reckon we could go even *bigger* next time. Excellent first mission, men!”

Peter whimpered,

“*First* mission?!”

First Year: Marauders

Wednesday 15th September 1971

The next morning James and Sirius could barely contain their excitement and hurried their dorm mates down to breakfast before any of the other Gryffindors. They were the first students to reach the great hall, other than a few Ravenclaws bent over their NEWT revision books with huge mugs of black coffee.

“Perfect,” Sirius beamed at the empty benches, “Front row seats!”

“Bet no one shows up for hours.” Peter groaned, half asleep, propped up on his elbows.

“Oh cheer up,” James poured them all large mugs of tea, “Don’t want to see the fruits of our labour?”

“Not at six in the morning.” Peter replied, slurping his tea. Sirius winced at the sound and pushed a plate towards him,

“Have some toast and stop whinging.”

Remus took some toast too and cut it into four pieces. He spread marmalade onto one quarter, jam onto another, butter on the third and lemon curd on the last. He ignored the look of amusement Sirius was giving him. Remus had never had so much choice before, and was determined to make the most of every meal.

Fortunately, they did not have to wait too long before the other students began to trickle in for breakfast. The first Slytherins arrived just as Remus was finishing his toast. Three boys and two girls; third years. They walked over to their table, quite unaware of the four eager Gryffindors watching them intently. For a few moments it was as if nothing was different. Sirius sighed with disappointment. But then. The tallest boy shuffled slightly in his seat, rubbing his arm. Another seemed to be looking for something in his pocket, but from Remus’ viewpoint he was clearly scratching his leg furiously. The third kept using his wand to rub behind his ear.

“It worked!” James whispered, breathless with excitement. Even Peter looked cheerful now.

As more and more Slytherins filtered in, their problem became more obvious – and more hilarious. By seven o’clock the Slytherin table was full of squirming, writhing, scratching boys, and horrified looking girls. Amycus Carrow, a burley sixth year, eventually ripped off his robes, his school jumper and even his tie to claw at his chest which Remus could see was already red raw. He almost felt sorry for them.

But then Snape came in. Whether it was karma or sheer luck, Severus seemed to have reacted particularly badly to the rosehip seeds. He walked in with his head bowed, hair falling over his face, but his nose was still visible and clearly bright red.

“Oh Merlin!” Sirius wheezed, laughing so hard he was holding his stomach. “Tell me we got his face!”

“Oi, Snivellus!” James yelled out, suddenly, to get the other boy’s attention.

Snape spun around, looking up; his hair parted. The left side of his face was covered in an angry red rash, from his temples all the way down to his neck, disappearing under his uniform. His left

eye was red too, the lid swollen and irritated.

“Looking good!” Sirius crowed, and all four boys dissolved into giggles as Snape stormed out of the room.

By the time breakfast was over, the entire castle was buzzing with rumours about what exactly had come over the Slytherin boys. Sirius and James looked as though all of their Christmases had come at once, and even Peter had cheered up remarkably – reminding them all that *he* had kept lookout, after all, making the entire venture possible.

“It was all Lupin’s idea, though,” Sirius returned, slapping Remus heartily on the back, “What shall we do to celebrate, eh? Exploding snap? Raid the kitchens?”

Remus shook Sirius off, smiling politely.

“Well, whatever you do, you’re doing it without me,” he replied, “I’ve got double detention.”

“From Slughorn?”

“Yeah, and McGonagall. And Flitwick, but that’s tomorrow. Then my Herbology detention is over the weekend.”

“Bloody hell mate,” James frowned, “You going for a record or something?”

Remus shrugged. He was always being punished at St. Edmund’s – all the boys were. Detention didn’t bother him. Though exploding snap did sound like a lot of fun.

“Maybe you’d better start doing your homework?” Sirius said, gently. Remus rolled his eyes, getting up from the table.

“C’mon,” he said, “It’s Defence Against the Dark Arts first, thought you two loved that.”

* * *

Later that day, Remus was on his way to his detention with Slughorn, when he ran into Lily Evans. He was perfectly happy to keep walking, but she smiled and fell into step with him.

“Hiya Remus,”

“Hi.”

“Are you going to the dungeons?”

He nodded.

“Me too. I have to tell Slughorn that Severus can’t make his detention.”

“Oh, right.”

“Did you hear what happened to the Slytherins?”

“Yeah.” Everyone had heard – it was all they’d been talking about all day, even during lessons. Fortunately no one had a clue yet who’d done it. It had been a good idea, attacking the entire house at once. Who could guess who the target had been?

“Crazy, isn’t it?” Lily continued, “Poor Sev was allergic to whatever they used. Madam Pomfrey

gave him a sleeping draught while the swelling goes down.”

Remus sniggered, without thinking. He glanced at Lily, who was looking back at him with reproachful green eyes. She shook her head.

“Look, I know he wasn’t very nice to you. The other day in Potions *or* on the train. He’s... well he’s a bit of a snob, ok?”

Remus snorted.

“But I wanted to say sorry.” Lily pressed on, “I need to stand up to him more. Shouldn’t let him get away with it. He’s actually a really nice person when you get to know him.”

“If you say so.” Remus stopped walking. They were outside Slughorn’s office now. The door was closed, and there were raised voices on the other side.

“Horace, whoever it was, they must have been a Slytherin!” It was Professor McGonagall, “Who else has the password?”

“Why would a Slytherin attack their own house, Minerva?!” The Potions master sounded very frustrated.

“You did say it was only the boys dorms affected. Perhaps it was one of the girls.”

“Really!”

“Well, who else? Peeves? He never enters the common rooms – doesn’t enter the dungeons, either, come to that – too frightened of the bloody baron.”

“We ought to place a ban on all Zonko’s products.”

“From what Poppy says it *wasn’t* a Zonko’s product. Rosehip, from the greenhouses.”

Lupin felt as trickle of fear run down his spine. If they knew that much, would they be able to find out who’d done it?

“Rosehip eh? Very clever.” Slughorn actually sounded impressed. McGonagall sighed,

“I suppose you’d like to blame the Ravenclaws now?”

“I just wish I knew who’d done it!” He sighed, heavily. “Perhaps the truth will out. I suppose it does seem more likely that it was one of the Slytherin girls than...”

“Than a gang of marauders creeping into the dungeons under the cloak of night with malicious intent?”

Remus could hear Slughorn’s chuckle at that.

“Yes, quite.”

“Now, I must be going.” McGonagall was saying, her footsteps approaching the door. “You will let me know if you catch the culprit?” The door swung open. Remus and Lily stepped back, guiltily. McGonagall looked down at them through her spectacles, “What are two Gryffindors doing so far from their tower?”

“Please, Professor, Remus and I were only—“

“Ah!” Slughorn cut off Lily’s nervous rambling, “Lupin, my boy – and Miss Evans! Come to offer Snape’s apologies, eh? No need, dear girl, no need. With everything going on today I think we can cancel the boy’s detentions, for now.” He came to the door and looked down at Remus severely, “If it is understood that there will be no more fighting in my classes? Or any classes, for that matter, hm?”

“Yes, Professor.” Remus nodded, solemnly, trying not to look too pleased.

“Excellent.” Slughorn beamed, locking the door to his office, “Then if you’ll excuse me, I’ve some enquiries to make.”

Remus and Lily had almost made it to the end of the hall when McGonagall suddenly called out,

“Mr Lupin?”

Remus’ heart sank.

“Yes, Professor McGonagall?”

“That isn’t to say that your detention with *me* has been cancelled. Come along now, we’ll get an early start.”

* * *

McGonagall had him doing lines for an hour – not too bad, considering he was used to canings at St Edmund’s. He didn’t mind copying and repetition; it was soothing. *I will complete all assignments set.* Perhaps he’d swallow his pride next time and copy James’ homework. Or Peter’s, if he didn’t want to look too suspicious. But he knew that James would eventually want to know *why* Remus never read the set text. And if he told him, then he was equally sure that James and Sirius would try to get him to explain to McGonagall – both boys had unerring faith in the teachers of Hogwarts. Remus, however, had never met an adult he trusted. She’d have him sent back to St Edmund’s at once. What good was an illiterate wizard to anyone?

Once his detention was finished, he climbed through the portrait hole and into the common room to find his three roommates waiting for him. Peter and James were engaged in a very serious looking game of chess (*of course the pieces are moving.* Remus thought to himself, *everything has to bloody move in this castle.*) while Sirius was listening to one of his records through a very posh looking set of brand new headphones. Remus was dying to have a listen, but he hadn’t worked up the courage to ask yet.

He sat down next to Sirius quietly. The long haired boy pulled his headphones off at once,

“That was quick!”

“Only had to do one in the end,” Remus explained, “Slughorn let me off, too busy trying to sort out the itching powder thing.”

Sirius grinned broadly, leaning back on the couch with his arms folded under his head,

“That prank is just the gift that keeps on giving.”

“Snape was allergic and everything,” Remus said, smirking, “That ginger girl said he’s been in the hospital wing all day.”

Sirius laughed even louder. His eyes grew bright when he laughed, Remus had never seen anyone

exhibit such pure joy. It made you want to punch him and be his friend all at the same time.

“Which ginger girl?” James looked up suddenly,

“Check MATE!” Peter cried.

“You know, the annoying one. Evans.”

“I don’t think she’s annoying.”

“Ok.” Remus shrugged.

“Let’s not talk about girls.” Sirius rolled his eyes, “This might be the most important day of our lives! This is the day we became legends; the day our friendship was forged in the fire of itching powder!”

“They don’t know it was us, do they?” Peter asked, nervously, tidying away his chess set. Remus shook his head.

“Slughorn reckons it was a Slytherin girl. Or a gang of marauders.”

“Marauders!” Sirius sat up, suddenly, “That’s it! Raise your glasses, boys!”

“We don’t have glasses.” James replied, amused.

“Well, just pretend.” Sirius shook his head, irritably, “From this day forward, we are *The Marauders!*”

He said this with such a dramatic flourish that it could only be followed by stunned silence. James was grinning, Peter glancing at him for direction, not quite understanding what was going on. Remus burst out laughing.

“What sort of poncey gang name is that?!”

First Year: Secrets

Tuesday, 5th October 1971

The next full moon passed much as the first had. This time the wolf had clearly grown restless, because Remus awoke with a number of deep scratches.

“They heal fast with a bit of antiseptic.” He advised Madam Pomfrey, who fussed over him in the chill morning light.

“And faster still with magic,” she smiled, with a flourish of her wand. The cuts closed up almost instantly, Remus stared, amazed.

“Can you get rid of the scars, too?” He asked, eagerly. She shook her head sadly,

“No, Remus, not these ones, I’m sorry.”

“S’ok.” He sighed, dressing for school. This time he’d brought his change of clothes with him and left them in the tunnel just outside the shack to avoid having to go back to the tower this time. He’d meet the other boys in their first lesson, and let them wonder where he’d been.

“You don’t have to go to school today,” Madam Pomfrey was saying, “Not if you’re too tired. I can write you a note.”

“I want to go.” He replied, “It’s not that bad, honestly.”

Pomfrey looked at him with serious eyes,

“Not that bad for now. I’m afraid the transformations may start to take their toll as you grow up.”

“Have you looked after other kids like me, then?” He’d been wanting to ask for ages, but wasn’t sure how.

“No, dear, you’re the first Hogwarts student that I know of who’s been...”

“Bitten?”

“Who’s been bitten.” She accepted, gratefully, “But I promise I know what I’m doing. I’ve done plenty of reading on the subject.”

“You mean there are books? About people like me?”

“Well, yes.” She sounded surprised. She sat down on the bed as he finished dressing. “You could borrow one of them, if you like?”

He thought about it, then shook his head.

* * *

They had Transfiguration first thing, but McGonagall didn’t give him detention for not bringing his homework – she had obviously decided to be more lenient around the full moon. She did make him promise to bring it with him next time, and he agreed, hoping he sounded sincere. James, Sirius and Peter spent half of the lesson trying to get his attention, but he steadfastly ignored them until McGonagall threatened to separate all four of them.

In the halls on their way to Charms, Remus knew there was no escape. It was a good five minute walk.

“So? Where were you?!” Sirius blurted out, walking on his left hand side.

“Nowhere.” He replied, trying to hurry on,

“Oh, go on,” James pleaded, coming up on his right side, “Tell us! Was it the same place you went last month?”

“Maybe.”

“Were you in detention again?” Asked Peter, struggling to keep up. Remus cursed himself for not having thought of that – detention would have been the perfect cover.

“Nope.”

“Then where—“

“Watch it, half-blood!”

Remus had been too busy evading questions to look where he was going, and had run smack into Snape, who was coming around the corner. Already wound up, Remus squared his shoulders and attempted to push past, roughly,

“Watch yourself, *Snivellus*.”

Snape didn’t move, and pushed him instead, Mulciber appearing at his left shoulder, looming menacingly over the smaller boys.

“I know it was you that broke into our dorms the other night.” He hissed, “*All* of you.”

“Yeah? Prove it.” James smirked, folding his arms.

Snape’s lips curled,

“I can’t, yet. But I will. I’ll get you back too, I promise.”

“We’re *quaking* in our boots,” Sirius replied, leaning against the wall as if he was bored. “Now would you kindly move it?”

“Your idea, was it, Black?” Snape drawled, “Or yours, Potter? Had to have been one of you. Pettigrew doesn’t have the guts and dear Lupin here clearly hasn’t got the brains...”

Remus clenched his fists. He could see Snape’s hand on his wand – Severus probably knew all sorts of curses and hexes. James had taught Remus one or two, but he was too blind with rage to remember any of them now.

“Move along now, gentlemen.” A sharp voice suddenly rang out over the corridor. It was Professor Flitwick, stepping out of his classroom to see what the holdup was. “Severus, you’re clogging up the halls, and you four are supposed to be in my class. Come along.”

Remus felt overheated and agitated for the rest of Charms, which was usually his favourite lesson. It relied more on practical work with his wand than reading or writing, and he often did better than even James and Sirius. Finding it difficult to calm down, he kept shooting his cushions across the room like missiles rather than guiding them carefully through the hoops Flitwick had hung from

the ceiling.

They'd been working on levitation charms for a few weeks now, and Peter was the only one still struggling. In Remus' opinion, Peter's problem was a lack of imagination. James and Sirius were both unerringly confident; and he'd found that confidence was all you needed to complete most basic spells. Remus himself generally felt able to complete any task if it looked simple enough. Peter, on the other hand, *worried* about everything. He read and re-read his textbooks, trying to copy the complicated diagrams there rather than just copy what Flitwick showed them.

"I expect you all to be able to levitate this book by the end of the week," Flitwick said at the end of the lesson. The book was enormous, about half the size of the tiny professor, and looked as though a fully-grown man might have trouble carrying it very far. "So come prepared for a quick test of your abilities."

Peter groaned as they collected their things to leave.

Remus had managed to calm down by lunch time, but still had trouble controlling his magic later in the afternoon and was glad they only had Herbology and History of Magic. He wondered whether it was his temper – which had always been short – or whether it was the full moon. He always had a lot of energy after a transformation, even before he knew he could do magic. Now his wand buzzed in his hand like the static in a TV aerial. He tried a quick '*Lumos*', hiding in a toilet cubicle between lessons, and nearly burnt his retinas out.

Perhaps the book Madam Pomfrey had mentioned might tell him more about it, but he'd never know now. There might be other books in the library, but he hadn't checked. He knew the word, well enough, and could spell it out if he concentrated hard. But he didn't dare. Remus lived in fear that if he wrote it down, or said it out loud, then somehow everyone would find out his secret. And it was just better to keep stuff like that in your head.

* * *

Thursday 7th October 1971

It was especially important to keep his secrets to himself now, because Remus was being watched. By McGonagall, who still raised an eyebrow when she saw he wasn't taking notes, by Madam Pomfrey, who was always trying to get to him stop by the hospital wing for a quick check over, and by Snape, who was still furious that he couldn't figure out how the itching powder incident had happened. Remus might have been able to bear all of these interferences, if it wasn't for a fourth person observing him.

This stalker was much subtler, much less direct in his surveillance, but noticeable nonetheless. Sirius. At first Remus had thought the other boy was just nosy – part of that entitlement he and James shared. They had to know everything about everybody. They were constantly telling Remus and Peter other people's business – so-and-so's father was turned down for a promotion at the ministry years ago, and that's why they have that chip on their shoulder; Miranda Thrup's great-aunt was once under investigation for the illegal use of a love potion, and now no one ever drank tea at the Thrup's house; Professor Slughorn knew more about the dark arts than he let on, and the Slug Club was notorious for turning out dark wizards with influence.

Of course, neither of them knew anything at all about Remus, and in the beginning, he assumed that this was why Sirius was so watchful. But he never asked any direct questions, and if he was curious about Lupin's family or upbringing then it was a private interest that James did not share. James rarely watched other people, Remus had noticed – he preferred other people to be watching him.

No one else seemed to notice, thankfully. Sirius was sly in that respect. Only very occasionally, Remus managed to catch him unawares, staring intently with those deep blue eyes. He didn't even have the shame to look away when he was caught – only softened his gaze into a friendly smile, which Remus was obliged to return.

That Thursday they were finishing their homework in Gryffindor common room – well, James was finishing Remus' homework, having completed his own. He'd offered to do it in return for Remus teaching him the '*Obfuscate*' spell, and despite his pride Remus had acquiesced. He really didn't want another detention with McGonagall, and James was good at imitating other peoples' handwriting.

Sirius was completing his own essay, and had already written three inches extra on the uses of lacewing flies in transformative draughts – plus diagrams. There were books strewn all over the table they'd claimed for themselves, along with inkwells and scrunched up rolls of parchment. Peter was trying to levitate an apple and get it into a waste paper basket four feet away. So far he could get it up in the air, but then it wobbled and fell back down again.

Frazzled, Peter ran his fingers through his hair again and consulted his text.

"You'll get it, Pete, don't worry." James murmured, not looking up from Remus' paper. "Keep at it."

"I'm *trying*," Peter whined, "I'm sure it's the movement I'm getting wrong... the book says to use a 'smooth, serpentine action', but I'm not sure..." he swirled his wand in the air. Remus tutted,

"It's not like that." He said, bluntly. "It's like an S shape on its side. Look." He performed the spell, effortlessly lifting the apple into the air and sending it sailing into the bin neatly.

"An S shape, are you sure?" Peter frowned. He aimed his own wand at a scrunched-up ball of paper from the table, "*Wingardium Leviosa!*" He chanted, waving his wand in the same way Lupin had. Sure enough, the paper flew shakily upwards then flew with slightly less grace into the bin, bouncing off the sides as it fell to the bottom and landed beside the apple. Peter stared wide-eyed, "I did it!" He gasped, "An 'S' shape, why didn't it just say that in the book?!"

"Well done, Pete." James said, looking up and smiling. He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes, "You should be a teacher, Remus."

Lupin snorted, looking away bashfully. James continued,

"I'm nearly done with this, just need to check something – can you pass me *Magical Theory*? The Waffling book?"

Remus felt a cold shiver run down his spine. Trying not to panic, he looked down at the pile of books James was pointing at. One of them was definitely about potions – it had a cauldron on the cover. The others; it was anyone's guess. The gold and silver lettering on each cover seemed to shift and swirl before his eyes. Was it better to just pick one up, even if it was the wrong one? He looked back at James, desperately, who was reading over what he'd written. Peter was too busy levitating more balls of paper to notice Remus' turmoil. He looked down again, biting his lip.

Sirius cleared his throat quietly and leaned across the desk. He silently tapped one of the books with his forefinger, without looking at Remus. It was a big black leather-bound tome which Remus recognised vaguely. Gratefully, he snatched it up and handed it to James.

"Cheers mate." James said, absentmindedly, returning to his work. Sirius carried on as if nothing

had happened. Remus felt his cheeks burning.

First Year: Scars

Chapter Notes

Mention of child abuse towards the end of this chapter.

Friday 15th October 1971

Remus had to spend the next few days avoiding Sirius – or at least avoiding being alone with him. This wasn't easy, the boys spent all their time together, especially on the weekends. They all got through the Friday Charms lesson with no trouble; even Peter. Flitwick was thrilled that the entire class had mastered levitation so early in the year that he let them all out early for lunch.

Sirius made himself unavoidable the very next week, during their flying lesson. If Remus hadn't hated History of Magic so much, then Flying would have been his least favourite subject. Twenty minutes into their very first lesson with Madam Hooch he had learnt that he was afraid of heights, and the rest of the classes had been miserable for him.

James was the star of the class, of course, and even the other Marauders found him insufferable as he flitted around the quidditch pitch, throwing loops and feints as if he was born on a broom. Sirius was excellent too, and most of the other kids in the class had grown up playing on broomsticks; even Peter was competent.

It had rained the night before, and the ground was soft and muddy. They'd changed out of their usual lace up shoes and into thick boots and scarlet flying kits before squelching out onto the pitch. They picked up their brooms and awaited instruction. The brooms were provided by the school. First years weren't allowed to bring their own, but James would tell anyone who stopped long enough to listen that he had a top of the line model at home.

"Right, mount your brooms please, ladies and gentlemen," Hooch bellowed at the group, "Nice strong wind today, so I want you all to take good care. Potter, no showing off!"

Remus clambered onto his broom, swallowing hard. If he could manage not to be sick then it would be a victory.

"I'd like five clean laps around the pitch, then a good landing back here from each of you. Mind the puddle and remember to lean into the wind where possible. Use it to your advantage. Five points to whoever's back first." And with barely any warning, the silver haired witch blew her whistle hard.

Remus and Lily, the only two muggleborns in the class, were the last off the ground. Once the redhead was in the air, however, she streaked ahead with ease.

"Bit higher, Lupin! Come on now!" Hooch boomed from below, shouting through a megaphone. He wanted to ignore her, but there was no escape – at least back at St Edmund's when they made you do cross country you could hide around the corner and skive off in town for the afternoon.

He pushed himself higher, trying to look ahead and not down; trying to think about anything other than the empty space between himself and the ground. He could see Lily's bright red plait flashing

ahead like a fox's tail, Peter's shining blond hair somewhere towards the middle of the group. Though he couldn't see that far ahead, he knew that James and Sirius were almost neck and neck. Remus just ploughed on grimly, not wanting to go any faster. Who cared if he was last, if he didn't break his neck getting there. As he rounded a corner at the end of the pitch, the wind really hit him and he tried not to slow down too much, leaning forward. It was so cold, and the grey morning air battered his face.

The second lap was as bad as the first. By the third, he noticed that James had taken to circling each of the towers in the empty spectator stands, despite Madam Hooch's admonishments. On the fourth lap, Remus had company.

"Having fun?" Sirius grinned, cruising along beside him. He looked so comfortable, as if he could raise both hands over his head, spin upside down and fly backwards without any trouble at all.

"What are you doing?" Remus frowned, trying to ignore him. "Trying to lose?"

"James is gonna win," Sirius shrugged, "Might as well let him have his moment. Thought I'd hang out with you."

"Why?!" Remus replied, through gritted teeth.

"Thought you might want the company," Remus didn't need to look at him to know that he was grinning that irritating Sirius Black grin. "Plus we're about to land, and I know you hate landing."

"Piss off."

"No."

"I'm warning you, Black..."

"You can't punch me up here, Lupin, unless you want to let go of your broom."

"God, you're annoying."

"Yep." Sirius flew up in front of him, then all the way around, a perfect orbit.

"Piss *off*." Remus tried to dodge him, wobbling dangerously.

"Time to land... remember to stick your legs out and lean back... then bend your knees as you hit the—oi!"

Remus had grabbed the tail of Sirius' broom and given it a hard yank. Laughing, Sirius righted himself, then flew back to Remus' side and gave him a hard shove back. Remus shook, but held on tight, making his descent. It was much smoother than before, he leaned back, then twisted quickly to push Sirius again.

"Out of my way!" He yelled, going faster, "You can be the last down for once!"

"Oh no you don't!" Sirius now grabbed Remus' broom tail, laughing, tugging him backwards. This was perhaps a step too far, as they were both quite close to the ground now. The two wrestling boys tumbled towards earth, brooms flying out from beneath them they both crash landed into a huge muddy puddle, skidding and rolling forwards, soaking their robes in the process.

"Black! Lupin!" Madam Hooch marched over to the two boys sprawled in the mud.

The other Gryffindors gathered around, giggling and pointing. Sirius leapt to his feet with all of the

grace his nobility blessed him with, and pulled Lupin up roughly by the hand. They both looked up at the teacher, blinking water droplets from their eyes.

“What did I say about minding the puddle?” Madam Hooch raised an amused eyebrow. She usually saw the fun in things. “A point each from Gryffindor. You’d better go and wash off in the showers. Off you go.”

They both waddled towards the quidditch changing rooms, holding out their heavy, waterlogged robes.

“Bloody ridiculous kit.” Remus grumbled as they stepped into the squat littler stone building. “How we ever going to dry it?”

“The house elves will take care of that.” Sirius replied, shaking his off and dumping it in a pile in the corner.

Remus couldn’t be bothered to ask what on earth house elves were. He pulled his own robes off and kicked away his boots, then entered a shower cubical to continue undressing. There were towels laid out already, and the water was deliciously warm. He leaned forward into the stream, letting it warm his blood, watching the mud and rogue blades of grass swirl down the drain. At least he’d got out of forty more minutes flying.

He scrubbed his hands roughly over his hair. Without Matron’s monthly haircuts his hair was getting longer and softer, sticking straight up most of the time, as messy as James’. He could finally see the colour of it, but was disappointed – it appeared to be a bland mousy brown.

Remus finished in the shower before Sirius and got out, looking around for his uniform quickly. He was half dressed once Sirius finally emerged, his long hair swept back, wet and shining like oil. He was already fully dressed and looked impossibly cool and grown up, while Remus had realised he’d missed a button on his shirt and had to begin all over again.

“What’s *that*?!” Sirius said, suddenly. Remus looked up, then back down. Sirius was pointing at a long silver stripe which stretched from the left half of his collar bone down diagonally across his chest to his right nipple. He fumbled with his buttons, trying to close the shirt faster.

“A scar.” He muttered. There was no point saying anything else now. He barely noticed them anymore. They were just there, as much a part of him as his freckles, or the fine hairs on his arms.

“It’s... did it happen to you at the home? Where you grew up?”

There was something odd in Sirius’ voice. Remus found he couldn’t speak, so he just nodded. Sirius nodded too. “I’ve got scars.” He said, so quietly that Remus thought he’d misheard at first.

Sirius bent down, and pulled up his trouser leg, turning his ankle to show Remus the marks there. His scars weren’t like Remus’ – which were big and rough and jagged, full of rage and hunger. The silver stripes on the backs of Sirius’ legs were thin and straight; uniform in their cruelty. Remus stared for a few seconds, before Sirius dropped the edge of the fabric and straightened up.

They stared each other down for a full minute. Remus feeling very hot, Sirius’ eyes cool and calm. Then it broke.

“Shall we go and watch James making a prat of himself?” Sirius asked.

Remus nodded again, and they both stepped back out into the cold autumn air. They took their seats on the hard benches in the spectator’s stands and watched the rest of the class flitting back

and forth across the pitch, red robes fluttering behind them. Lily, though lacking James' formal technique, was giving him a run for his money when it came to speed, beating him in two out of three races between goal posts.

"Remus?" Sirius said, suddenly, as their classmates came in for their final landing.

"Yeah?"

"You can't read, can you?"

Remus sighed. He had enough secrets to keep as it was. And Sirius had shared one of his.

"Nah."

"I won't tell anyone."

"Cheers."

That Sirius Black grin.

First Year: History

Saturday 23rd October 1971

“Did you just never get taught?”

Remus shrugged, tired and frustrated. It was a week after the flying lesson, and Sirius had caught him on his own again. He’d been sitting quite happily on his bed, flicking through one of James’ quidditch magazines – he liked the moving pictures, even if he still didn’t understand the rules, and it was the closest thing to telly they had at Hogwarts.

“I got taught.” He replied, turning the page, hoping Sirius would take the hint and get lost. He didn’t. Remus closed the magazine. “I got taught.” He repeated. “Just didn’t learn properly. When I look at the words, I don’t think I see what everyone else does. It doesn’t make any sense; all the letters keep jumping around and changing. Teachers said I was just thick.”

No one had made much of a fuss about his problems with schoolwork at St Edmund’s. They’d barely had any homework, since no one did it anyway. Lots of the boys had problems; either they couldn’t or wouldn’t be taught. It wasn’t as if anyone expected much either way.

“But how have you been *doing* it?” Sirius was like a dog with a bone.

“Doing *what*?! ”

“Well... everything! All your work, here, at Hogwarts.”

Remus looked at him as if he was the one who was stupid,

“Sirius, I *haven’t* been doing it. In case you haven’t noticed, I’m in detention every night.”

“Well, yeah, obviously,” Sirius waved a hand, “But the other day, in Potions, I saw you – you didn’t take any notes, didn’t even look at the book, *or* the blackboard, and you still prepared all of the ingredients for the cure for boils perfectly – Slughorn gave you five points!”

Remus felt himself blush at the memory. He wasn’t used to getting praise from teachers.

“Oh, that was easy,” He shook his head, “Sluggy told us how to do it in the lesson before, I just remembered it.”

“Bloody hell, you must have a brilliant memory, then.”

Remus shrugged. He supposed that was true. His teachers at St Edmund’s had remarked more than once that he knew an awful lot of words for somebody so dim witted.

Sirius was staring into space now, clearly deep in thought – Remus could practically see the cogs working in his mind. Sometimes Sirius was an entirely closed book. Other times he was so easy to read it was almost funny.

“If you could read, you’d be as good as me and James. Better, probably.”

Remus snorted,

“So modest, Black.”

“Well, you would!” Sirius missed the sarcasm completely, still looking thoughtful, “Your wandwork is much more natural, and if your memory is as good as you say it is...” He chewed his lip, “I bet there’s a spell for it.”

Remus laughed,

“You’re going to cure me with a spell?”

“Why not?”

Remus had thought about it already; of course he had. But he was more aware of the limitations of magic than anyone. After all, he had scars which would not heal and a monthly nightmare which nobody could prevent.

“Magic can’t fix stuff like that.” He replied bluntly. “Why else does James wear glasses?”

“I think there *are* spells for eyesight.” Sirius said, “Maybe they’re just not worth the effort, or too dangerous, or complicated or something.”

“It’s not just the reading,” Remus countered, “My writing’s crap too; I’m too slow, and it comes out all messy.”

“There are *definitely* spells for that.” Sirius said, confidently, “You can bewitch your quill, I’ve seen my father do it on official documents. His handwriting’s really scratchy, normally.”

Remus was at a loss. Sirius clearly wasn’t going to give up. He chewed his lip.

“Why are you so interested, anyway?”

“You’re my fellow Marauder! We can’t have you in detention every day, what if the Slytherins strike back? We’ll need your evil mind for pranks.” His eyes glittered. “Speaking of, I’m assuming you haven’t done your history homework yet?”

“Nope.”

“Ok then, let’s get started.” Sirius jumped off the bed and began rooting around in his trunk.

“No. You’re not doing my homework for me.” Remus protested, standing up himself, folding his arms.

“Too bloody right, I’m not,” Sirius replied, withdrawing a heavy book. It was *A History of Magic*; Remus recognised the size and shape. “I just fancied refreshing my memory, that’s all. So, I’m going to sit here and read it aloud – because that helps me study – and if *you* happened to retain some of it in that enormous brain of yours, then there’s not much I can do about it.”

Remus huffed,

“Haven’t you got something better to do? Where’s James, anyway?”

“Watching the Gryffindor quidditch practice,” Sirius settled down on his bed, opening the book.

“Reckons he’ll get on the team next year, so he’s trying to pick up some tips. Peter’s followed him, obviously. Now, be quiet please, I’m trying to work.” He cleared his throat, “*A history of magic, by Bathilda Bagshot. Chapter one, Ancient Egypt; the rights and rituals of Imhotep...*”

And on he went. And on, and on. Remus stayed standing for a while, trying to decide whether or not to just walk out of the room and slam the door. But he found that he really wasn’t that angry – it

was difficult to stay angry with Sirius, no matter how annoying he was. So Remus sat down, and listened. It turned out that history wasn't that boring after all, not when you understood the basics. Plus Sirius was considerably more animated than Professor Binns.

His voice was clear and steady, never stumbling over the more complicated words or phrases, as if he had read the book a hundred times. Remus had once heard him tell James that he was fluent in Latin and Greek – the Black family apparently took pride in that sort of thing.

On he ploughed, chapter after chapter, from the gory Egyptian resurrection charms to cryptic Greek oracles, to magical Mesopotamian priestesses. The ancient world opened up in Remus' mind, and he found himself lying back on his bed, arms behind his head with his eyes closed, letting Sirius lead him through time.

Eventually, the other boy's voice was almost hoarse, and he spoke just above a whisper. Evening had closed around them, and the common room was bathed in a golden orange glow as the sun set. Halfway through '*chapter five; Tiberius and the advancements of Roman battle magic*,' Sirius let out a quiet cough, and put down the book.

"I don't think I can study any more today," he croaked.

Remus' eyes snapped open. He sat up, blinking.

"That's ok," He said, quietly. "It's dinner now, I'm starving."

They both got up, stretched, and headed downstairs.

James and Peter were waiting for them at the Gryffindor table in their usual seats.

"How was practice?" Sirius asked, after draining a goblet of pumpkin juice. His voice had almost returned to normal, only sounding slightly strained.

"Cracking." James replied cheerfully, spearing a sausage on the end of his fork and using it to scoop up some mashed potato, "How come you didn't come?"

"Homework." Sirius replied, pouring gravy over his own mash.

As they finished their dinner, James regaled them with a blow by blow account of the quidditch practice, listing every player on the team, their strengths and faults, their techniques and what he would do to improve them. Peter interjected occasionally with his own opinions, which barely differed from James'.

Pudding was millionaire shortbread, which neither Sirius or James liked. Remus thought they were mad, and took their distaste as evidence of their snobbery. He'd have eaten theirs too, but Peter got there first, scoffing the lot.

"I've got some sweets," the smaller boy offered, digging in his robe pockets and withdrawing a bulging brown bag, "Mum sent them, help yourself."

"Cheers Pete!" They dug in, munching their way through fizzing whizzbees, chocolate frogs and flavour changing gobstoppers happily. Remus helped himself to a few as well, until they all felt quite sick.

"What homework were you doing?" James asked, scratching his chin, distractedly, "I thought we'd finished everything for this week."

“Yeah, um, I was behind on history. Had to go back and check something.” Sirius was scratching too, near his collar bone.

Watching them made Remus start to itch. The back of his hand tickled as if a small insect was crawling over him. He suddenly thought of the itching powder and looked down.

He nearly screamed. The back of his hand was growing thick dark hair, at an alarming rate. He was transforming! It wasn't anywhere near a full moon – how could this be happening? He stood up so suddenly he nearly fell over backwards. He had to get out of there – fast!

“What's up, Lupin?” James stared at him, startled.

Remus looked back at him, then at Sirius. *They* were both growing hair too – dark curls sprouted from their faces, their hands and arms – every bit of exposed skin. He gaped, speechless. He ran his tongue over his teeth – they weren't getting any longer.

“Oh bloody hell...” James said, looking down at himself, then at the other two boys, “What's going on?!”

“Peter,” Sirius growled, his face now almost covered in hair, “Are you *sure* your mum sent those sweets?”

Peter, who hadn't had any sweets yet, stared at them both, and turned red, spluttering,

“Well, I mean... I *thought* they were from her... they arrived this morning...”

“Pete!” James roared. People were looking at them, now, turning and nudging each other. Soon, the entire dining hall was whispering and pointing at the three incredibly hairy boys at the Gryffindor table.

Plenty of people were giggling, too, but of course no one was laughing louder than Severus Snape, over at the Slytherin benches.

“Come on,” Sirius stood up, sticking his furry nose up with an air of aristocratic dignity that was nothing short of hilarious, “Let's get to the hospital wing. We can plot our revenge later.”

As they left to howls of laughter from the rest of the great hall, Remus cringed in shame, covering his face with his hands. Every inch of him was now covered in the same glossy black hair. He didn't find it as funny as James and Sirius seemed to.

“Told you they'd strike back,” Sirius muttered.

First Year: Birthdays, books and The Beatles

Fortunately, Madam Pomfrey was able to undo the hex with a few flicks of her wand. She still lectured all of them on misuse of dangerous magic.

“As if we all wanted to look like bigfoot!” James complained as they left the hospital wing, skin still tinging from the hair growth.

“It had to be Severus. He coated the sweets in one of his potions, I know it.” Sirius seethed.

“Yeah, we all know it, mate.” James replied, “Don’t worry, we’ll get him back.”

“I’m so sorry!” Peter wailed, for about the hundredth time. “I really thought they were from my mum!”

“It’s fine, Peter,” James patted his shoulder, “Just wish you’d given them to us first thing on a Monday – then we could have at least bunked off Transfiguration.”

“I demand retribution!” Sirius shouted, raising his wand dramatically. Remus laughed, James did too,

“And you shall have it!” He replied, pushing his glasses back on his nose, “Patience is a virtue, Black. Vengeance like this takes time. Don’t suppose you’ve got any other brilliant ideas, Remus?”

“Sorry,” Remus shook his head. His heart was still pounding from the terror of it. If he had seen Snape at that moment he would have throttled him; never mind pranking him.

“I’ll help you, James,” Peter piped up, “I’ll do *anything*, I won’t be scared this time, I’ll...”

They were just turning the corner which led to Gryffindor tower when somebody behind them called out,

“Sirius.”

All four boys turned. Sirius made a small shocked noise. It was Bellatrix Black.

“Whaddyou want?” He asked, looking down and scuffing his shoes on the flagstone floor. It was the most un-Sirius posture imaginable, Remus thought. He also noticed that James stepped forward, standing shoulder to shoulder with his friend.

“Come here and address me properly.” The seventh-year witch snapped in response.

Sirius didn’t move. Bellatrix withdrew her wand – Remus was shocked, and for the first time since he’d been at Hogwarts, he felt frightened.

“Come here,” she said, in a low voice, “Or I’ll make you. And it won’t be a childish little hair growth charm, I promise.”

Sirius walked forward, shaking his head at James, who tried to follow. They all watched the cousins speaking in quiet voices at the end of the hallway for long, uncomfortable minutes. Sirius barely looked up from the ground the whole time. Finally, she patted him on the head, then turned on her heel and left. They all exhaled, relieved. Sirius walked back to them shakily.

In silence they all entered the portrait hole and sat down at their usual sofa.

“Alright, Sirius?” James asked, first.

“Yeah.” He nodded, looking paler than usual, “She um... she wanted to invite me for tea. On my birthday. I think my mother must have made her, probably held a family conference. Try to bring me back into the fold.”

“Just because you’re in a different house?”

“And the company I’m keeping,” he smirked at them all.

“So when’s your birthday?”

“Two weeks. The third. I have to go to this tea, though, Bella’s not joking about knowing some really vile curses.”

“We’ll do something afterwards, then. Something good, yeah?”

Peter and Remus nodded enthusiastically, but in the back of Remus’ mind he remembered that the third was the night of the full moon.

* * *

Sirius turned twelve and Remus wasn’t there to celebrate it, though he didn’t think anyone minded. James was Sirius’ best friend, after all, and Peter still liked to think that James belonged to him a little bit, too. So Remus would have been the odd one out, even if he hadn’t been locked away in a shack trying to tear himself apart. Madam Pomfrey tried him with a sleeping draught this time, before the moon rose, but it apparently had no effect. What was worse, he managed to give himself his biggest scar yet – right across his back.

Pomfrey made him stay in the hospital wing all day afterwards, which was actually fortuitous – it meant he could just tell his friends he’d been suddenly taken ill. They were still a bit confused as to why he hadn’t told them anything about feeling sick beforehand, but went along with it. They probably already thought he was fairly odd, and by now accepted mostly anything he told them.

He wouldn’t have enjoyed the birthday. James talked to Madam Hooch and arranged a lunch time flying session for the three of them. After dinner, before Sirius had to go and change for tea with his cousins, James and Peter led the Gryffindor table in a round of ‘Happy Birthday’, followed by ‘For he’s a jolly good fellow’. According to the students Remus heard from afterwards, they had sung ‘and so say all of us!’ over and over, getting louder each time until Professor McGonagall had to threaten them with detention if they didn’t stop.

As November marched on, the days grew shorter and the castle darker. They spent less of their time outside, and more of it huddled by the fire in the common room, playing card games and plotting revenge against Snape. The first term was drawing to a close, and the teachers seemed to be piling on more homework than ever.

Whenever Sirius and Remus were away from Peter and James (usually when the other two were in the library), Sirius was reading to him. They finished *A History of Magic* in just under two weeks, and then alternated between *A Beginner’s Guide to Transfiguration* and *Magical Drafts and Potions* for the rest of the term. When the marauders worked on their homework as a group, he even took to reading aloud, as if to himself, claiming it helped him think. This was very much to James’ annoyance, who preferred silence.

Though they couldn’t possibly cover the entire syllabus in such a short time, to everyone’s amazement (including his own) Remus’ marks were improving at an astonishing rate. Sirius had

apparently had the right idea; Remus' ability to retain and recall information was remarkable, and he found himself raising his hand in lessons for the first time in his life.

Sirius' marks, on the other hand, began to fall. He spent so much time trying to secretly assist Remus, that he apparently no longer did any of the extra reading he'd prided himself in all year. As it was, his own homework became average, passable and fell behind James' for the first time. James was oblivious, of course, and merely assumed that *he* was actually improving.

"But you spend so much time in the library!" Remus whispered to him once, after Sirius had received an 'Acceptable' mark on his Charms essay. "I thought you were studying." Remus himself had still not worked up the courage to visit the library. The thought of all of those books horrified him.

"I am studying," Sirius replied, cheerily, "Just not this stuff," he folded the essay away, "I'm looking up cognitive interpretation spells – you know, so you can read by yourself. It's really tricky, OWL level, actually, but I think I've almost got it. Don't *worry*, Lupin, it's not as if I'm failing. This is much more interesting, anyway."

Remus felt horribly guilty, of course, as well as mildly ashamed that Sirius was devoting so much time to helping him. He honestly could not remember a time in his life that anyone had ever *tried* so hard on his behalf. It made him wish he could do something – anything in return. But, other than having a difficult family, Sirius Black seemed to want for nothing at all.

In fact, there was one thing Remus could give Sirius which even James could not – but it hardly felt worth mentioning. Something Sirius called 'muggle insight'. It began when Remus finally plucked up the courage to ask about Sirius' record collection. Sirius was only too happy to share; other than his racing broom, which was still at home, his albums were his dearest possessions.

Remus could easily see why – he had *Introducing The Beatles*, *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*, as well as *Abbey Road*; *Beggars Banquet* and *Sticky Fingers* ("Mick Jagger has to be the coolest muggle I've ever seen," Sirius gushed), two Led Zeppelin albums – Remus hadn't listened to them before, but the older boys at St. Edmund's were all obsessed – and a Simon and Garfunkle LP, hidden at the back.

Wizards, it turned out, did not generally think much of muggle music. All of Sirius' records had been gifted to him by his cousin, Andromeda, who was apparently the first 'black sheep' of the Black family, having left school a few years beforehand and married a muggle.

"I hardly ever see her," Sirius explained, "Not since the wedding, but she posts these to me every now and then. She sends them the muggle way, so mum doesn't find out – she doesn't understand how the post office works."

So although he had an impressive collection by any eleven year old's standards, Sirius' musical passions existed almost entirely in a vacuum. He wasn't aware of any other Beatles songs than the ones he already had, pressed into vinyl. He had never listened to the radio, or watched Top of the Pops, or even opened a copy of NME before. As such, he found Remus endlessly fascinating on the subject of music and muggle culture.

"You've actually *seen* them, though!" He said, awed, "You've *seen* them performing."

"Not in real life, or anything," Remus replied, uncomfortably.

"No, I know, on the *telephone*," Sirius nodded sagely. Remus stifled laughter,

“On the *television*.” He corrected, “It’s more like those moving paintings you lot have. Only black and white. And only the Beatles – the Stones came on once and Matron made us turn it off, because of their hair.”

“What about their hair?”

“Too long,” Remus shrugged, “She said they looked dirty.”

“My hair’s much longer,” Sirius said, frowning.

“Yeah, it is. But muggle boys don’t have long hair, not normally.”

“Don’t tell him that!” Peter teased, “He’ll shave his head.” He threw a gob stone across the board on the floor – they’d been playing a lazy game off and on for the past few days, trying to teach Remus the rules. It rolled into one of Sirius’ stones and knocked it out of the ring, immediately squirting out a disgusting smelling liquid, which Sirius barely dodged in time. Peter grinned, “Ha, take that, muggle lover!”

Sirius swore, loudly, and left to change his clothes.

First Year: Christmas 1971

“Lupin, perhaps you can tell me – what are the transfigurative properties of lapis philosophorum?” McGonagall called out, towards the end of their lesson one day. She gave him a very pointed look – the last time she’d asked him a question in front of the class he had shrugged and looked away.

“Um...” Remus wracked his brain, “Well, I think that’s the one that turns stuff into gold? If you use it right... and Cleopatra the Alchemist used it to turn lead into silver, I think.”

“Correct.” McGonagall sounded as if she was trying to mask her surprise. “Five points to Gryffindor. And another five for making the connection to Cleopatra the Alchemist – she’s not mentioned in *Transfiguration for Beginners*, did you read that in your history text?”

Remus nodded, aware that everyone was looking at him.

“Well, excellent. Some of my third-year students are incapable of cross-referencing their studies like that, I’m pleased to see you taking such an interest.” She addressed the class, “And we will begin discussing alchemy after Christmas. Which reminds me – with the holidays approaching, I’d like to ask any students planning to remain at Hogwarts over the break to let me know by the end of next week. Thank you, you’re dismissed.”

The class stood up to leave. A few people patted Remus on the back as they passed.

“Mr Lupin, if you have a moment?” McGonagall said, just as he was passing her desk. His stomach dropped. He’d gone two weeks without a detention from her; he should have known something was coming. He stood still, shoving his hands deep in his pockets and staring at his feet as the rest of the class filtered out.

Finally, the classroom empty, she walked over and shut the door (right in James’ face) and turned back into the room.

“Well done today, Remus,” McGonagall said, kindly, “You’ve really been doing well lately.”

He looked up at her, startled. She laughed,

“Don’t look so surprised! I’m very impressed. Professor Slughorn and Professor Flitwick have said the same. I wanted a quick word with you about Christmas. I’ve spoken with Mrs Orwell—“

“Who?!”

“The lady who runs St Edmund’s.”

“Oh, right, Matron.”

“Quite. As you know, the full moon will occur twice in December – the second,” (that was next week) “and the thirty-first. New Year’s Eve. Mrs Orwell seems to be of the opinion that you would be better off remaining at Hogwarts over Christmas for this reason. I hope you aren’t too disappointed.”

Remus shrugged,

“I’m not fussed either way.”

Professor McGonagall nodded, very seriously.

“I shall add your name to the list, then. I’ll see you next week, Remus.”

* * *

James invited Sirius and Remus to visit him over the break, knowing that neither of them were facing a particularly merry Christmas otherwise. Remus was forced to decline – even if he hadn’t been incredibly shy about visiting James’ home and meeting his parents, he was still legally in the care of St Edmund’s local authority, and needed written permission from Matron to leave Hogwarts.

Sirius, who would have loved the opportunity to spend two weeks mucking about with James, racing their brooms and eating chocolate, also had to refuse. His family had made it quite clear that they did not approve of him visiting the Potter family under any circumstances.

“Bellatrix, that bitch, has been feeding my parents information.” He explained, darkly, “Apparently, I’ve disgraced them enough already. If I go to yours then it’ll only get worse. Sorry, mate.”

Remus went to the edge of the grounds with the marauders all to wave them off on the last day of term.

“We’ll send you owls!” James promised, “See if you can come up with our next plan of attack on Snape!”

Remus grinned and promised he would try. He hoped that the letters James sent would not be too long. He was the only Gryffindor first year staying behind for the break, and trudged a lonely path back up to the castle.

The next day he enjoyed lying in – something they were never allowed to do at St. Edmund’s. He slept until ten o’clock, when Frank Longbottom poked his head around the door,

“Come on Lupin, you’ll miss breakfast at this rate!”

Remus liked Frank – he had a broad, friendly face and an easy-going manner. He seemed altogether solid and dependable, like an older brother. He understood that Remus was used to being an outsider, and tried to include him wherever possible without pushing too hard.

After breakfast Frank disappeared to the owlery and Remus sat glumly in the common room, feeling the next two weeks stretch before him, empty and lonely. He considered a walk around the grounds, but it had started to rain heavily. He played a few of Sirius’ records and flipped through a stack of magazines some fourth years had left behind, just looking at the pictures. They were mostly of pretty, glamorous witches and handsome wizards – he supposed it was a fashion mag.

The next few days passed in much the same way. Frank would get him up in the morning, he’d eat all his meals with the remaining Gryffindors in the Great Hall, but otherwise he was left to his own devices.

He was so bored at one point that he even thought about doing some of the homework he’d been set. He’d been trying to improve his handwriting, but it was almost impossible with the ridiculous feather quills they were provided. No one would answer him properly when he asked why they couldn’t just use biro’s. Even pencil might have been better. He actually did try to read for a while, but after attempting a paragraph from his herbology text gave up in frustration. He copied out a few of the diagrams instead – Remus didn’t mind drawing; he liked the freedom of it.

Every day he walked around the castle for a few hours, with his map. The other boys had long

since discarded theirs, having learnt all the classroom locations after the first week or so. But Remus hung on to his, still bothered by its incompleteness. He'd begun marking it up himself, adding points of interest, hiding places and the secret passageway he'd found.

The rest of the time he spent avoiding teachers who were concerned about his being alone. He wasn't the only student left in the school, but most of the others were sixth and seventh years, who generally stayed in the library revising hard for exams, or working on their coursework. Slughorn was holding special extra Potions classes in the dungeons, but Remus hadn't been invited and probably wouldn't have gone anyway.

He practiced a few spells, and entertained himself for a good few hours trying to see how many objects in their dorm room he could levitate at once. He made a game of it, throwing various objects – books, gob stones, decks of cards – up in the air, and trying to stop them before they hit the ground. He had to stop that, eventually, when Frank knocked on the door and told him irritably to keep the noise down.

* * *

Saturday 24th December 1971

On Christmas Eve, Remus was woken earlier than usual – it was still quite dark. Heavy rain pelted the thick glass window panes, the sound of it loud enough to echo through the empty dorm room. But that wasn't what had disturbed him. The door was creaking open, and someone stepped inside.

Sitting up and peering through the gloom, Remus expected to see Longbottom telling him to get up for breakfast. But it wasn't Frank. It was a very soggy and dishevelled looking boy, with long hair and a haughty face.

“Sirius!” Remus leapt out of bed, overjoyed to see his friend.

Sirius pushed his wet hair out of his eyes – he'd clearly been out in the rain. He pulled off his heavy travelling cloak, dropping it in a pile on the floor.

“Alright, Lupin?” He grinned. “Freezing, isn't it?” He pointed his wand at the fireplace, “*Incendio.*”

“What are you doing here?!”

“Had enough,” He said simply, pulling off his boots, which were caked in mud. “Got into an argument with Dad, then the whole family got into it. All the usual stuff. Called me a blood traitor, the shame of the family, et cetera, et cetera...” He flopped down on his bed. “So I left.”

“Wow.” Remus rubbed his eyes, awestruck. “How did you get here?”

“Floo powder.” Sirius shrugged, “To the pub in the village. Then just walked up.”

“Wow.” Remus repeated.

“I'm starving, they sent me to bed last night without dinner. Come on, get dressed! Breakfast!”

McGonagall was not as pleased to see Sirius as Remus was. The two boys attempted to take their seats at the table as if nothing was out of the ordinary, but she appeared at their side almost immediately.

“Mr Black.” She said, a note of warning in her voice which Remus recognised from his detentions.
“What is the meaning of this?”

“I missed you too, Professor.” He grinned up at her.

The corner of the old witch’s mouth twitched, but she kept her composure.

“You were seen walking onto the grounds from Hogsmead at six o’clock this morning. Do you care to explain yourself further?”

Sirius shook his head,

“Not really, Professor. That’s pretty much all there is to it.”

McGonagall sighed, shaking her head lightly. She had the same look of pity she usually reserved for Remus.

“Very well, Mr Black. I shall have to contact your parents, of course, so that they know where you are.”

“No need.” Sirius replied, nodding at the flock of owls which had just swooped into the room. The largest of these birds, a huge, stately eagle owl, dropped a thick red envelope onto Sirius’ plate. He looked down at it, then up at McGonagall with a wry smile, “I think they know exactly where I am.”

He picked up the ominous envelope, and, without breaking eye contact with McGonagall, ripped it open. Almost immediately, the letter began to shriek. The voice was so loud that it filled the entire hall, causing heads to turn. McGonagall winced at the ear-splitting pitch of it. It was the voice of Sirius’ mother.

“SIRIUS ORION BLACK,” it shrieked, “HOW DARE YOU DEFY YOUR FATHER IN THIS MANNER!” Remus covered his ears. Sirius remained perfectly still, looking up at McGonagall, “CONSORTING WITH HALF BREEDS AND BLOOD TRAITORS! TURNING YOUR BACK ON YOUR FAMILY! IF YOUR GRANDFATHER WAS ALIVE HE’D HAVE DISOWNED YOU THE MOMENT YOU WERE SORTED! YOU WILL REMAIN AT SCHOOL UNTIL THE END OF THE YEAR AND THINK ABOUT THE SHAME AND DISHONOUR YOU HAVE BROUGHT TO YOUR NOBLE TITLE! DON’T THINK WE WON’T DISINHERIT YOU! YOU ARE **NOT** OUR ONLY SON!”

With that, the letter burst into flames, curling and shrivelling into a pile of chalk white ash. The silence that followed was deafening. Everyone was staring.

Sirius reached for some toast, put it on his plate, then began ladling scrambled egg onto it, nonchalantly. He glanced up at McGonagall again,

“You can send mother an owl if you like, Professor, but I doubt she’ll read it.”

“Very well, Sirius,” McGonagall nodded, “Just... try to keep out of trouble, will you?” With that, she walked stiffly back to the teachers table at the far end of the hall.

Sirius ate his breakfast in silence. Years later, Remus would always remember thinking in that moment that Sirius Black must be the bravest boy in the world.

Christmas day at St Edmund's was usually an extremely noisy affair. Some boys got presents delivered – those with distant relatives who cared enough to send a new sweatshirt perhaps, but not enough to visit – others made do with the usual selection of donations from the locals, which Matron had wrapped up for them. Gift-getting was quickly followed by gift-swapping, and they often passed the morning bartering and trading the meagre items they'd received. They were made to smarten themselves up, then led in a long line down to the church, where they would sit through the Christmas service, bored and slouching.

Christmas morning at Hogwarts was a good deal more pleasant. Remus was almost touched to find that Matron had not forgotten him – the post had arrived overnight and at the end of his bed he found a card from her, as well as a lumpy package which contained a bag of nuts, an orange, and a tin of biscuits. To his amazement, James had also sent a present – his very own set of gob stones. Peter had even sent a box of chocolate frogs.

"Merry Christmas," Sirius yawned, opening his own gifts. He had nothing from his parents, as far as Remus would see, but didn't mention it. James had sent him an annual of his favourite quidditch team, the South End Scorchers, and he had a box of frogs from Peter too.

"Merry Christmas," Remus returned, "I didn't get anyone any presents," He admitted guiltily. "I didn't know they would..."

"Don't worry about it," Sirius replied, on his way to the bathroom, "No one expected you to."

This troubled Remus, but he tried not to think about it. While Sirius was in the loo, another owl flew in the window and dropped a large, flat, square package on his bed. When Sirius came out and saw it, his eyes lit up and he ripped it open, eagerly,

"It's from Andromeda!" He explained, pulling the record out, showing it to Remus, who hurried over excitedly.

It was another muggle album. The cover was black, printed with the silhouetted image of a man standing in front of a huge amplifier, playing a guitar. He had long, wildly curly hair, stood with his legs apart in a power stance, outlined in gold. *Electric Warrior*, the title blared, *T-Rex*.

"Ohh, T-Rex, I think I've heard of them," Remus said, as Sirius flipped it over to read the track listing.

"Stick it on!" Remus encouraged, impatient. Who cared what the cover said?

Sirius did, sliding out the slick black disc and settling it onto his turntable. The record began to turn, and the room filled with music – a smooth, sliding throb.

'Beneath the bebop moon/I wanna croon/With you-ooo...'

They sat and listened entranced, stopping only to flip to the B-side. Once it was over, Sirius wordlessly turned it over and began at the beginning again. They alternated between sitting on the bed, swaying slightly to the melody, or nodding their heads as the beats quickened. They shared grins with each other at the catchiest riffs, and lay down to stare at the ceiling for the slower, dreamier tracks.

Eventually, halfway through the second listen, Frank came in,

"Merry Christmas lads – come on, breakfast!"

They dressed quickly and went down to the dining hall. The Great Hall had been decorated

garishly by the teachers – glittering ropes of tinsel in red, green and gold sparkled from every rafter, hanging down like festive jungle vines. Twelve enormous trees twinkled with lights in every colour imaginable, and baubles the size of footballs hung from every branch.

After breakfast, the boys ran back upstairs to listen to the album again.

“It’s the coolest thing I’ve ever heard.” Remus declared. Sirius nodded, solemnly.

Sirius’ favourite song was Jeepster – he loved the twanging chords, the aggressive thump of it. Remus like Monolith best; it was spacey and smooth, the words both nonsensical and meaningful at the same time. It made him feel like he was floating.

For the rest of the day they played music in the common room, ate their way through the chocolate frogs, nuts and biscuits, and played rowdy games of exploding snap. Meals at Hogwarts were always spectacular, and Christmas dinner was no different. By the time night had fallen, Remus had eaten so much he thought he might never be hungry again.

Though he didn’t say it to Sirius (who, after all, had been forced to run away from home for the first – if not the last – time), it was Remus’ best Christmas ever.

First Year: Lectiuncula Magna

Chapter Summary

Sirius gets an idea and Remus gets a gift.

Tuesday 27th December 1971

With Boxing Day over and done with, Remus and Sirius found themselves caught in those strange nowhere days between Christmas day and New Year's Day, as they awaited their friends' return. Sirius was keen to plan their revenge on Snape – in fact, he was no longer interested in attacking all of the Slytherin's anymore, wanting to focus his energies on one single nemesis.

Remus was inclined to agree. He had been too furious with Snape to think clearly about it for the past few weeks. He couldn't shake the feeling that Severus had somehow hit upon the exact hex that would cause Remus the most upset. He didn't know quite how the Slytherin boy had managed it – and it was very likely just a clever guess – but he didn't care.

“We should just get James' cloak, follow him around 'til he's alone, then beat the shit out of him.” Remus growled, as they sat in the empty common room one evening. He gripped the arm of the settee as he said this, feeling the leather creak under his grasp. It was getting close to the full moon and his temper was closer to the surface than usual.

“Now, now, Lupin,” Sirius chastised smoothly, carrying a pile of books he'd brought from the library. “You're thinking like a muggle. If we're going to get him, we're going to get him with magic.”

“Not more books.” Remus whined, as Sirius plopped down beside him, an enormous tome in his arms. He opened it, and it was so big that the cover rested across both of their skinny legs.

“Yes, more books.” Sirius replied, breezily. “You'll love them once you get to know them, I promise.”

Remus wasn't so sure about that. It was true, he'd grown to quite like their secret study sessions, and had been privately amazed at the amount he had learnt. But listening to Sirius was one thing – sitting down alone and staring at a block of text was another thing altogether. Still, Sirius kept promising him that he was getting closer to a solution.

“So what's this one about?” Remus asked, resigned to his fate. If Sirius wanted to do something, there was very little anyone could do to stop him. You just had to hold on tight until it was over.

“Hexes and jinxes. A lot of them are really complex, though. I mean, we're *good* – you, me and James, anyway – but I still think we should stick to the basics. Simplicity is key.”

“Ok.” Remus replied, dully. He still preferred the idea of a surprise beating.

“So I thought we could brainstorm all the stuff we can do, and see if that lends itself to any good jinxes.” Sirius continued, undeterred by Remus' reluctance, “So, I'm really good at transfiguration – I got the best marks even after you started catching up.”

“Right.” Remus agreed,

“And James is a *bit* better than me at Defence Against the Dark Arts – which you’d think would be helpful when dealing with a slimy creep like Snivellus, but we haven’t really learnt any good spells yet, except disarming stuff, and that’s no use.”

He chewed the nib of his quill, considering. It wasn’t a new quill, and left a dark stain on Sirius’ bottom lip. Remus didn’t say anything. Sirius carried on, “James is good at flying, too, obviously, but I dunno how that’s going to be any help. Then there’s Pete... good at sneaking around and grunt work, I suppose...”

Remus thought that was rather unfair. Peter was never top of the class like Sirius and James, but he was generally perfectly competent, usually settling for a satisfactory mark. He lacked the competitive edge James and Sirius had, the desire to prove himself. Remus recognised this well enough – it was enough just to be friends with cleverer, more confident people, sometimes. You got a bit of their shine with none of the pressure.

“Pete’s good at Herbology,” Remus pointed out, “And Potions.”

“Both useless.” Sirius shrugged, “*You* were the one who came up with the rosehip thing, and we’re never going to best Snape at Potions – I hate to admit it, but the bastard’s too good. Anyway, then we’ve got you; you’re probably best at Charms.”

“Not *best*,” Remus said, hurriedly, “I’m good at levitation, I suppose, but that’s it.”

“Oh shut up, this is no time for modesty, Lupin,” Sirius waved an impatient hand, “You pick up spells quicker than anyone. If we find a sufficiently hideous hex in here, then I’m counting on you to figure out how to do it.”

Remus squirmed. He hated when Sirius talked like that – as if Remus was as clever, or as gifted as he and James were. He knew it wasn’t true, and it embarrassed him. He fought a sudden urge to push the big heavy book off their laps and walk away.

It was just the full moon, he told himself. He felt fidgety and too hot by the fire, too close to Sirius, who’s blood he could smell, mixed in with the unique scent of magic. He vaguely hoped that dinner would be red meat – something he could taste the iron in.

“It has to be something big,” Sirius murmured, flipping all the way to the back of the book – Remus let out a yelp as the full weight of it thudded against his thighs. Sirius ignored this, running a finger down the index. “Something much worse than the hair thing.”

Remus shuddered at the thought of Snape’s prank. Rage surged up in him again. Or was it hunger? He shook his head, pushing the book away and getting up, pretending he just had to stretch. His joints ached already as his body prepared itself for the coming transformation.

“I dunno why you think I’ll be any help.” Remus sighed, yawning now.

“Muggle insight.” Sirius grinned. “Like the itching powder. You can come up with stuff Snape won’t see coming.”

Remus scratched his head, wracking his brain,

“Can’t think of anything *bad* enough,” he said, “Once we got a bucket of water and propped it up over a door – which you have to leave a bit ajar, y’know, then Matron was supposed to walk through and get soaked. Except Matron didn’t walk through, the cook did, and we got served shit

food for a month.” His stomach growled at the mention of food. “That’s a pretty tame prank, to be honest. Are you hungry? Can we go down for dinner yet?”

“Yeah, I s’pose,” Sirius closed the book. “We could get a bucket pretty easily, but it seems like there’s a lot of room for error. And I dunno if it would really strike fear into his heart the way we want it to. We’re marauders, we should be setting certain standards.”

Remus chuckled as they climbed through the portrait hole,

“Yeah, told you it was rubbish. Shame, ‘cause Snivellus could do with a good wash.”

Sirius laughed back. Then he froze, and gripped Remus’ shoulder,

“Oh, you genius! You bloody genius!”

“What?!” Remus replied, shocked and a bit annoyed to be shaken about like that.

“A good wash! That’s what we’ll do! It’s easy, I bet, it’ll be in one of those books… wait here!” He disappeared back through the portrait. Remus sighed, hungrily, and waited.

* * *

“So wait, explain it to me again?” Remus whispered, as they finished their plates. He used the remains of his roast potato to mop up what remained of the gravy. He might have seconds – he ate like a horse on the nights before the moon. “It sounds complicated.”

“It isn’t,” Sirius shook his head, “I reckon it’s easy. Weather spells are hard on a grand scale, but this only needs to be a cloud the size of this plate.” He tapped the porcelain in front of him.

“Would it be like the ceiling?” Remus asked, jerking his head up at the charmed rafters. It was raining, as it had been all Christmas, but the downpour vanished before it reached them.

“A bit,” Sirius replied, “But smaller. And without whatever charms are stopping us from getting wet.”

“But… couldn’t he just step away from it?”

“Not if we combine it with a binding spell!”

“But… we can’t mix spells yet. Well, I can’t. Can you?” He looked up at Sirius, who was nodding vigorously,

“Yeah, I’ve been having a go at it, for your reading thing. It’s actually not too hard; you just have to concentrate.”

“That’s what they say about reading,” Remus sighed.

“We’ll practice.” Sirius said, firmly, “We’ll practice loads, before James and Pete get back. They’ll be dead impressed.”

There was no time for seconds after that, so Remus had to satisfy himself with the remainder of his Christmas biscuits as Sirius looked up weather charms. Once he’d found what he wanted, they both took it in turns to have a go, Sirius reading out the directions several times before they understood them.

It was the first time Remus had attempted a spell without having it demonstrated for him first.

Daunting to begin with, he quickly understood how the wand movement ought to flow and twist, while Sirius was best at pronunciation. It did take a lot of concentration, and it was nearly midnight by the time either of them had produced anything at all. Finally, Remus managed to cast a small, grey cloud. It poured from his wand like smoke, then hovered between them for a few moments before bursting like a bubble, leaving only a faint trace of condensation.

Sirius grinned, broadly,

“This is going to work!”

* * *

Saturday 31st December 1971

It was hard to shake off Sirius on the night of the full moon. Remus even told him he was feeling sick, but then the other boy wanted to accompany him to the hospital wing. Eventually he managed to convince him that he ought to stay behind and keep practicing the raincloud charm.

“We’ve basically got it now, though.” Sirius complained. It was true, they’d both managed to produce satisfactory miniature rainstorms – the bathroom had almost flooded in the process. It was just a matter of maintaining concentration, and perfecting the binding aspect now.

“Find something else to do, then.” Remus snapped, halfway out the door, skin crawling, stomach growling. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“How’d you know she’ll keep you overni--?!”

Remus had escaped before having to answer any more questions. He was getting careless, he thought to himself as he knocked on McGonagall’s office door. Eventually he’d have to think of a decent excuse for all of his absences. They were sure to connect the nights he vanished to the full moon eventually – they all did astronomy together.

The shack was cold, the walls damp from the relentless rain. Remus wished he’d brought his wand; he’d learnt to cast a good fire charm now. But he supposed it would be no good if there was a fire blazing when he turned. He might burn the whole place down.

The transformation came on more suddenly than usual. Ever since Madam Pomfrey had told him they would get worse, he seemed to feel it more. He still fought not to scream, worried that McGonagall or Pomfrey might hear him on their way out of the tunnel. He didn’t need any more pity.

* * *

Sunday 1st January 1972

The next day, Remus could barely get up after he’d changed back. He pulled a blanket around himself instead, and lay on the floor waiting for Madam Pomfrey to arrive. Every inch of him hurt, more than ever. His head pounded as if a troll had stomped on it. Every tooth in his jaw ached, the tendons in his shoulders felt as if they’d been stretched so far they had snapped. He’d broken almost all of his fingernails. There were huge claw marks in the wallpaper.

“Remus?” Madam Pomfrey’s soft voice came through the door, “I’m coming in now, dear.”

He closed his eyes, unable even to groan.

“Oh,” She said, as she entered the room and found him on the floor, “Bad one, was it? Perhaps it’s the solstice, I’ll have to consult my books. Can you get up, Remus?” She touched his forehead with the back of her hand.

He opened his eyes and nodded weakly, taking her arm and hauling himself up. That was a mistake. As soon as he was on his feet his head swam and his stomach lurched. He bent forward and vomited onto the floor.

“Never mind,” Madam Pomfrey said, kindly, an arm around his trembling shoulder. She pointed her wand at the mess and it vanished in an instant, “No harm done. Let’s get you somewhere warm now, shall we?”

She wanted to magic a stretcher to carry him back to the castle, but he couldn’t bear the shame of it, no matter how early in the morning it was. They walked back, very slowly, and up to the hospital wing, where he finally collapsed into a clean, soft bed. The nurse continued to fuss around him, but he was already drifting to sleep.

He woke up feeling marginally better. His headache had left him, anyway. He blinked blearily, reaching for the glass of water beside him. Someone picked it up and handed it to him. He drank deeply, then set it down, looking up expecting to see Madam Pomfrey. He jumped,

“Sirius!” He rasped, his throat still sore. God, had he actually been *howling*? How embarrassing.

“Happy new year,” Sirius said, cheerily. He was sitting on the little wooden stool put there for visitors, clutching a book to his chest. “Thought I’d come looking when you weren’t at breakfast. You all right?”

“Fine,” Remus said, sitting up, hurriedly, rubbing his head, “I um... I get migraines sometimes. I’m feeling better.”

“Good.” Sirius nodded, “Because I’ve got your Christmas present ready.”

“My... what?” Remus stared at Sirius warily. His blue eyes were bright and full of mischief.

“Sorry it’s late,” He was saying, “I had a few last-minute tweaks to make. Here.” He handed over the book. It was Remus’ copy of *A History of Magic*.

“What..?” Remus wasn’t sure if he was just having a very odd dream. Why was Sirius giving him his own history book?

“Open it!”

Remus did. He had hardly opened the book all year, and the pages were still stiff and immaculate, except for the very first page. Below the title, Sirius had written something in his own neat cursive handwriting. Remus squinted at it, his mouth twisting with effort. He was already exhausted, he didn’t have the energy for riddles.

“Sirius,” He sighed, “You know I can’t—“

“Put your hand on it!” Sirius said, eagerly, stepping forward, “Palm flat against the page – yeah, like that. Now, give me a moment...”

He withdrew his wand from his pocket and paced the point lightly against Remus’ temple.

“Sirius, what are you doing?!” Remus was alarmed – he’d never had a wand pointed at him before,

and he'd seen Sirius blow up bigger things than his head.

"Trust me!" Sirius shushed him. A look of concentration came over his face. He took a deep breath. Remus squeezed his eyes shut, preparing for the worst. At least he was already in the hospital wing. "*Lectiuncula Magna!*" Sirius said, forcefully.

Remus felt an odd jolt, as if he'd missed the last step on a staircase. It hadn't hurt, exactly, and at least his head was still attached. He opened his eyes and looked at Sirius,

"What was that?"

"Look at the book!" Sirius pointed, practically dancing on the spot with excitement, "Tell me what it says!"

Remus sighed, and looked down at the book in his lap. It was exactly the same; a blank white page with Sirius' slightly slanted thick black handwriting. He stared at it, not sure what he was supposed to be doing.

"Read it!" Sirius prompted.

"I..." Remus looked down, and looked at the first word.

'Happy'

A voice in his head said. Remus blinked in shock – he'd never heard the voice before, though it sounded like him. It was almost like the sorting hat, only more familiar, less invasive. He looked again.

'Happy Christmas,'

--it read;

'Now you can do your own bloody homework. From your fellow marauder and friend, Sirius Black.'

Remus laughed. He looked at Sirius, then back at the page. He split the book open to a middle page, looking at the words printed there:

'during the late sixteenth century, Cornelius Agrippa made his greatest advancements in the field of natural magic...'

"Oh my god!" Remus exclaimed. He flipped a page again, and read more. The voice continued, confidently. He could read. "Oh my GOD!"

"It worked, then?!" Sirius asked, beaming.

"Sirius! This is... you!... I can't... How?!"

"Oh no," Sirius chuckled, "Don't tell me I've messed up your brain so much you can't even form a coherent sentence?"

"Thank you." Was all Remus could say. He could feel his eyes stinging with tears, and immediately rubbed them hard with his fists. Sirius looked away, politely.

"S'ok," he replied, "Now you can help me research our next big prank."

“We haven’t even got the first one off the ground yet,” Remus replied, sniffing hard, pulling himself together. “You have to show me how you did this... it’s... I mean, it must be really advanced magic.”

“Sort of,” Sirius shrugged, “I got the idea after Mother’s howler, actually. I thought if you can get a letter to scream at someone, then you can get a book to read to someone. Keeping the voice it in your head was the hardest part – I couldn’t tell if it was working on me or if I was just reading normally. Works on any book, though. I think. Not sure about other stuff yet, like potion labels or signs, but we can keep working on it...”

Remus couldn’t stop staring at the book, reading random lines and grinning to himself. He didn’t think he’d ever been so happy in his life.

First Year: The Prank

Chapter Summary

Snape gets what's coming to him...

Sunday 2nd January 1972

“Brilliant!” James exclaimed, slamming his hand down on the bathroom counter, “Completely brilliant!”

“You’re so clever!” Peter gushed.

The four of them were crammed into the small shared bathroom. Sirius was standing in the bath, fully dressed, holding an umbrella over his head, while Remus pointed his wand at a grey storm cloud hovering just above that. It was pouring rain. Sirius shuffled up and down the bathtub, but the cloud stayed firmly above his head, following his every move.

James and Peter had arrived back from their Christmas holidays only two hours ago, and as soon as dinner was over Remus and Sirius had dragged them upstairs for a demonstration.

“Lupin gave me the idea, but *I* looked up the charms to do it,” Sirius beamed, proudly, “He won’t know what’s hit him!”

“When can we do it?!” James was jumping up and down now, ready to explode with excitement. “First thing tomorrow? Breakfast? Potions?”

“Dinner,” Sirius shook his head, “More of an audience.”

“Yes, dinner,” James nodded, wisely, as if the idea had been his own. “Seriously, you two, I’m so bloody proud.”

“Cheers,” Sirius raised an ironic eyebrow. Then he looked at Remus, “Um... Lupin? You can probably stop now. My feet are getting wet.”

“Oh!” Remus shook off the charm, seeing that he had produced more rain than the ancient plug hole could manage, and Sirius was now ankle deep in cold water, the bottom of his robes soaked. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Sirius laughed, stepping out of the bath and squeezing out his robes, “Just make sure you do the same to Snape.”

“So, Lupin’s doing this one?” James asked. Sirius shrugged,

“He’s better at it. I can do it too though, if we get interference.”

* * *

Monday 3rd January 1972

The first day of lessons after Christmas was a very strange one. James, Sirius and Peter were full of nervous energy in anticipation of the practical joke. Remus was looking forward to that too – though somewhat nervous as it was he who had to pull it off. But he had another reason to be excited. It would be the first school day in his entire academic career that he would be able to read.

Sirius had shown him how to perform the spell, and it *was* very difficult – in the end Remus just had the other boy perform it for him most of the time, deciding to devote more time to learning how to do it himself later. His magic was still slightly wonky following the full moon, liable to overreach and ‘go off’ if he concentrated too hard. It didn’t seem like a good idea to turn his wand on himself until the moon waned enough and he had more control.

The first half of the day was everything he had hoped it might be. He couldn’t read the blackboard, but Charms was mostly practice based, and it amazed Remus how much easier everything became when he could just consult his text without having to remember everything Flitwick had said about softening charms. He was the first in the class to get his brick to bounce – much to the consternation of Lily Evans, who was usually the top Charms student.

It was in the afternoon, during Potions, that things began to go awry. It began with Slughorn returning their essays on the twelve uses of dragon blood. Remus had completed his before Christmas with help from Sirius, and the marauders as a whole did fairly well. As usual, Snape got the highest mark and earned five points for Slytherin. Lily was second and got a point for Gryffindor. She had only beaten Sirius by a few marks.

None of this was at all out of the ordinary – but apparently the tension of anticipation had grown too much for Sirius, and he couldn’t resist getting a shot in,

“Wonder if it’s worth cosying up to Snivellus just for a one measly house point.” He grumbled, loud enough for Lily and Snape to hear. Lily spun around, two bright pink patches on her cheeks,

“Shut up, Black,” she hissed, “No one likes a sore loser.”

“Hardly losing when your boyfriend lets you copy his work.” Sirius whispered back, venomously.

“I do *not* copy him, and Severus is *not* my boyfriend!” Lily’s face was getting redder.

“You’re blushing, Evans,” Sirius smirked, pleased with himself. He nudged James, “Isn’t that sweet?” James sniggered, nodding along.

“Ignore them, Lily,” Snape whispered, without turning his head, “They’re just jealous.”

“Jealous of what, Snivellus?” James jumped in, still trying to keep his voice down, “Jealous of a slimy greasy git like you? Keep dreaming.”

Sirius laughed, pleased to have drawn James in. Peter laughed too, so as not to be left out. Slughorn was still oblivious, now with his back to the class as he scribbled instructions on the blackboard.

Severus finally turned in his chair. He turned his beady black eyes on Sirius,

“I hear you had a very quiet Christmas, Black,” he said, his voice low and full of danger, “Your family couldn’t stand to have you around for more than a few days before packing you off back to school, is that right?” His lips curled, cruelly, “All of the pureblood families are talking about it – the Black’s black sheep.”

Sirius clenched his fists, Remus saw his knuckles turn white.

“Shut. Your. Face.” Sirius growled, through gritted teeth.

“Yeah, watch it, Snape,” James was frowning, “You’d better be careful what you say. Never know what might happen.”

“Is that a threat, Potter?” Snape replied, sounding bored, “Forgive me if I’m not quaking in my boots. Going to set Loony Lupin on me again?”

Remus, who had been half-listening to the posturing and half-listening to Slughorn’s instructions, flinched involuntarily. He’d had that nickname before. It was actually impressive that no one at Hogwarts hadn’t said it yet, especially when he knew he had a reputation for being a bit odd. Had everyone been calling him that, behind his back?

Reflexively, he picked up his wand. Snape saw, and his smirk grew even meaner,

“Oh my, have you actually learnt some *magic*, Lupin? I’m impressed. Mind you, I’ve heard they can train some monkey’s to perform basic tricks, so I suppose it’s no real achievement.”

Remus raised his wand, but Sirius grabbed his wrist and pushed it down on the desk.

“Not yet,” he muttered.

Remus clenched his jaw and looked back at the blackboard, seething internally. Snape chuckled and turned away too. Remus heard Lily whisper angrily,

“There’s no need to be so horrid to him!”

Remus could barely concentrate on the rest of the lesson. He knew he shouldn’t care what Snape thought of him, or anyone, for that matter. But the Slytherin boy’s barbs dug in and could not be shaken loose. Sirius didn’t help; he kept murmuring ‘we’ll show him!’ under his breath, throwing dark looks in Snape’s direction.

By the time dinner rolled around, Remus was white hot with rage and the desire to prove himself. He barely ate a thing, and it was Shepherd’s Pie, one of his favourites. He glared at Snape from across the room. This did not go unnoticed, and Severus nudged the boys around him, pointing at the marauders and laughing. Remus thought he could make out the words ‘loony Lupin’. James and Sirius scowled at them. Lily noticed too,

“You lot just leave Sev alone, ok?” She squeaked, “This stupid fight is going to go on forever if none of you can be mature enough to—“

“Give it a rest, Evans,” James rolled his eyes, “Bad enough you have to be friends with the tosser, now you’re trying to defend him? Where’s your house loyalty, eh?”

“This has nothing to do with *houses*,” She snapped, “It’s a ridiculous spat over nothing.”

“He insulted Remus!”

“You all pick on him all the time!”

“He *started* it!”

“Oh yeah, so you have to finish it, right, Potter?!” She stood up, suddenly, picking up her bag, “God, you’re so full of yourselves!” She walked away, her patent shoes clicking angrily on the flagstones.

“Loves a fight, that one,” James grinned.

There was a yelp of laughter from the Slytherin table and Remus decided he had had enough. He stood up too, pulled out his wand and pointed it at Severus.

“*Ligare Pluviam!*”

It was instantaneous and perfectly glorious. The raincloud shot from Remus’ wand with the speed of a bullet, so no one could even see where it had come from. It rested over Snape’s head, thick, grey and heavy. There was a low roll of thunder, and the downpour began.

He didn’t know what was happening at first, covering his head with his hands and looking up. The students sitting either side of Snape stood up and backed away, not wanting to get wet. Then Snape stood up, trying to dodge the cloud, but it followed him, hovering persistently, rain bucketing down.

People were laughing now, and pointing. Everyone was looking around, trying to see who had done it, but no one had seen Remus cast it, except for his friends. He sat down, but kept his wand trained on Severus, grinning as he watched the boy still trying to run away from the mini-storm.

“Yes!” Sirius’ hissed in his ear, “Bloody yes, Lupin, you beauty!”

The immense satisfaction Remus felt was compounded by the laughter echoing around him. Snape was such a nasty, spiteful boy, even some of the Slytherins looked pleased to see him get what he deserved. The more Remus thought about it, the more he wanted to punish him, and the harder it rained. In fact, the cloud seemed to darken and swell.

Snape was completely soaked now, his hair plastered to his head, getting in his eyes. His skin was pale and his robes shining with water, a puddle forming beneath him. Remus grinned as he watched Severus try desperately to escape, looking more and more like a drowned rat.

“Stop it!” Lily was screeching at James, “I know it’s you! Stop it now!”

James kept laughing and held up his hands to show that he wasn’t doing anything. Lily looked close to tears.

Severus made to run, arms over his head to stop the rain pelting him, but his robes were so heavy and so waterlogged that he half tripped, half slid and collapsed to the floor. Remus would have laughed, but his concentration deepened. The rain fell harder still, until it was difficult even to see Severus through the grey sheets. The cloud was bigger too, and crackling with thunder and lightning – it had never done that when he’d practiced on Sirius. But then, he hadn’t been as angry at Sirius.

“Stop it! Please!” Lily was sobbing now. James had stopped laughing. He touched Remus’ arm,

“Er... Remus? He’s had enough, mate...”

Snape wasn’t getting up. Remus realised that no one was laughing any more, and a few people were screaming.

“*FINITE.*” A voice boomed out over the dining hall.

At once, the rain stopped. Everyone was silent. Dumbledore stood in the entranceway – Remus hadn’t seen him since Halloween. He looked perfectly calm, despite the chaos he had just ended. The headmaster swept into the room, vanishing all of the water with a wave of his wand, and

bending over Severus.

Remus put away his wand and shrank into his seat, watching Dumbledore whispering over Snape's prone body. Lily was still sobbing, and ran over to stand beside Dumbledore, trembling and frightened.

"Everybody to your dormitories, please," Dumbledore spoke quietly, but was somehow heard by everyone in the huge hall, "Miss Evans, please fetch Madam Pomfrey."

Lily ran from the room, and the other students began to file out, obediently. James, Sirius and Remus all shot nervous glances at each other before hurrying to join the rest of their house.

First Year: Aftermath

Chapter Summary

In which Remus has a lot of very angsty feelings...

Most of the Gryffindors hung around in the common room, gossiping and chattering, all wondering who could have done it. The marauders, usually keen to be at the centre of any debate, all crept upstairs, pale faced with guilt.

Remus sat on his bed, staring at the floor. He had gone too far; he knew that. It had felt good, for a little while, and nothing could convince him that Severus hadn't deserved it. But now James was looking at him oddly, and he knew that Dumbledore would find out somehow – if Lily didn't tell everyone as soon as she got back to the common room.

"What happened?" James asked, carefully, "Did you lose control of it? That was really strong magic."

"It was amazing!" Sirius said, suddenly, "He'll think twice about crossing us again!"

"But... I mean, we didn't want to *hurt* him, did we?" James frowned.

"He's fine, he was just pretending, to get us in trouble."

"Will we get in trouble?" Peter asked, wringing his hands, "We didn't *all* do it, did we? It was only..."

Sirius slapped him around the back of his head,

"You rat." He said. "We're marauders. All for one and one for all."

"Whatever that means," Peter muttered, rubbing his head and going to sit on his own bed, sulkily.

"I did it, you lot shouldn't get in trouble." Remus said, quietly, not looking up.

"It was half my idea!" Sirius said, "I did the research! Don't worry, Lupin, I bet you anything he's fine."

"If he is," Remus said, heavily, "Then it's no thanks to me." He finally met James eyes. They were deep brown, and much more serious than usual. "I did mean to hurt him."

James held his gaze, and nodded slightly.

There was a knock at the door, diffusing the tension. It was Frank Longbottom.

"You four are to come to McGonagall's office, now." He said, gravely.

They followed Frank down the stairs and through the common room, where everyone stared at them. Remus looked at his feet the whole time, but he heard the chatter go quiet as they walked through. It didn't matter what happened next – everyone would know they were responsible.

McGonagall was not alone. Dumbledore stood beside her desk, his hands folded in front of him. He smiled pleasantly at the four boys who stood in a line before him.

“Good evening, gentlemen.” He said.

“Good evening, headmaster,” they all chanted back.

“You may be interested to know that young Mr Snape is quite well – though his pride has been rather wounded.”

They said nothing. Remus didn’t look up.

“He seemed to think that you four had something to do with his misfortune.” Dumbledore continued, pleasantly, as if he was just passing the time of day. “Particularly you, Mr Potter.”

James looked up, opened his mouth, then closed it again and looked down. Remus couldn’t bear it. He only had three friends in all the world, and he wasn’t going to lose them now. He stepped forward.

“It was me, sir, I did it. He said some stuff to me earlier, and I was pissed off with him. I wanted to teach him a lesson.” He forced himself to look up, into Dumbledore’s pale blue eyes. The old man nodded, satisfied.

“I see. You acted alone?”

“Yes,” Remus pulled out his wand, “Look, I can prove it—“

“No need!” Dumbledore said, hurriedly, “I believe you, Mr Lupin.”

“It wasn’t just him, sir!” Sirius burst out, “I looked up the spell, I learnt how to do it too, it’s just as much my fault.”

“You mean you planned this, Black?” McGonagall said, sharply, “You planned an attack on another pupil? Ten points from Gryffindor. Each.”

Sirius looked down again.

“And detention for all of you, for a month.” She continued, “I find it very hard to believe that Mr Lupin here acted alone.”

All four of them hung their heads.

“You may go, gentlemen.” Dumbledore said, quietly. “I have no doubt you will all take the time to apologise to Mr Snape, of course.”

Sirius made an indignant noise, and James elbowed him roughly. They turned to leave.

“Mr Lupin, just a moment,”

Remus froze. He should have known he wouldn’t get away with it that easily. He stood still as the others left the room, McGonagall following them out to make sure they didn’t loiter outside.

Once the door closed, a still silence fell. Dumbledore didn’t speak immediately, and finally Remus raised his head to meet the headmaster’s eyes. He didn’t look angry, or disappointed. He wore his usual pleasant expression – tinged with curiosity, perhaps.

“How have you been finding Hogwarts, Remus?”

That wasn't the question he had anticipated.

“Er... ok, I s'pose?”

“You seem to have had no problem making friends.”

That wasn't a question at all, so he didn't answer it. He looked at his feet, then back up.

“Am I getting expelled?” He asked. Dumbledore smiled,

“No, Remus, no one is getting expelled. I can see that you're sorry for what you've done. The thing that concerns me, is how you did it. That was a very strong spell, I wouldn't have expected a first year to... you must have been very angry.”

Remus nodded. He didn't want to tell Dumbledore why – about the names Snape called him, or how he made him feel stupid and worthless and small.

“Passion is an important quality in a wizard, Remus.” Dumbledore was saying, “It directs our magic, strengthens it. But as you learnt today, if we do not exercise control then we endanger everyone around us.” He looked very serious, his eyes had lost their twinkle. “I do not wish to frighten you, Remus. When we first met, I told you that I sympathised with you – the hand you have been dealt is not one I would wish on anyone. But you *must* be more careful. You are a gifted wizard, do not waste it.”

Remus nodded, wanting more than anything for the conversation to be over. He'd rather have the cane than a lecture. The worst part was that Dumbledore was right. He had let his anger towards Severus influence the spell he'd used – he just wasn't used to having that kind of strength.

“I'm sorry, professor.” He said, “Is Sniv—I mean, is Severus ok?”

“Yes, he's perfectly fine. I think he was hoping that if he simply stopped struggling then whoever was casting the spell would stop. He's been dried off and won't suffer any long-term effects.”

“Oh...” Remus nodded, “Good.”

“Now,” Dumbledore smiled, “Off you go. I've kept you long enough and I have a feeling that Mr Potter is waiting outside for you to tell him everything.”

* * *

Dumbledore had given him a lot to think about. And he had plenty of time to think – McGonagall was deadly serious about their detentions, and even went so far as to split the four of them up. Sirius was tasked with scrubbing cauldrons in the dungeons, Peter with polishing the trophies in the awards room, and James with re-configuring every astronomy telescope in the tower. Remus was given the worst task of all; mucking out the owlery. Of course, none of them were permitted to use their wands and every night they had to begin all over again.

“Cruel and unusual is what it is,” Peter complained at the end of the first week as they fell into bed, filthy and exhausted.

“Dunno what you're moaning about,” Sirius grumbled, “I'd love to polish trophies. Who knows what I've caught scraping out crusty potions from the bottoms of those bloody cauldrons.”

James just groaned, removing his glasses and rubbing his eyes.

Remus did not complain, because he didn't feel he deserved to. He felt terrible for getting all of his friends into trouble, but even more terrible for what he had done. This was only exacerbated by the amount of reading he had been doing. Sirius' spell was difficult, less intuitive than the magic he was used to. Sirius was the first to admit it wasn't perfect – it wore off after an hour or so and had to be repeated. Remus had just about mastered it enough to perform alone, though it often took him a few go's before he got it right.

The very first thing he had done was visit the library and borrowed a book from the magical creatures' shelves.

Every night, after they had done their homework and served their detentions, Remus would draw the curtains around his bed, light his wand, and read the same chapter over and over. There were entire books written on his particular problem, he had found, but he was terrified that someone would become suspicious if he started checking them all out. Plus, he wasn't sure he wanted to know any more. The things he'd read so far were bad enough.

He thought about the book almost constantly – in his lessons, at meal times, during detention. Words like 'monstrous', 'deadly', and 'darkest of creatures' flashed in his mind like neon signs. He'd known that he was dangerous, of course. He'd known that he was different. He *hadn't* known that he was hated. Hunted, even. Apparently, his teeth were worth thousands in certain parts of eastern Europe. His pelt was worth even more.

There were legislative details too – things he didn't fully understand, but which sounded horrible. Employment laws and registries and travel restrictions. It seemed that even if he could read that his job prospects might be no better in the wizarding world than they were as a muggle. He also understood why Dumbledore had told him to be careful. It was clear now that if anyone at Hogwarts found out what Remus was, then he might be in real trouble – and expulsion would be the least of his concerns.

Frustratingly, nothing he read was really relevant to his experiences. There was no account of a wizard actually living with the condition; how they had managed; what to expect; whether they had been able to hold down a job, or even just avoid hurting others. He'd assumed it was normal that he could smell blood and hear heartbeats – but how could he know for sure? Was it normal that his magic was stronger when the moon was rising? Sometimes he thought he could feel the sheer power of it, fizzing in his veins like a potion; filling him up and spilling over, bursting from his fingertips. And then there was his temper. How much of that was him, and how much of it was the monster?

He lay awake most nights, after the reading spell had worn off and he was too tired to cast it again but too restless to sleep. His mind whirled with worry and fear. How simple everything had seemed back at St Edmund's. No magic, no homework, no agonising moral dilemmas. And, of course, no friends. If anything stopped Remus from just giving up, then it was that.

It was James, who had an ego the size of the lake, but a heart to match it. Peter – who, yes, granted was weird and a bit clueless – actually had a wicked sense of humour and could be unfailing generous. And of course Sirius. Sirius could keep secrets, had a mean streak but never directed it at his friends, was the most gifted student in the year but spent all his time coming up with pranks instead.

Remus wasn't going to give up any of that, not if he could help it. Even if he had to be the swottiest student in the school; if he had to force himself to read every book, complete every assignment, follow every rule. He'd be so good they wouldn't know what hit them. So good they'd

have to make him a prefect – he'd do it all, if it meant staying at Hogwarts and keeping his friends.

There was nobody to talk to about any of these things. Nobody who would understand, anyway. As far as Remus knew, only Dumbledore, McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey knew about his condition. McGonagall was too severe to approach with questions like that. Remus still wasn't sure that Dumbledore was entirely sane, and anyway he had no idea how to make an appointment with the headmaster. So it had to be Madam Pomfrey, in the end.

He waited until the next moon, which came at the end of January. It was a Sunday, so after dinner he separated himself from the marauders and headed to the hospital wing earlier than usual.

"Remus!" The nurse smiled at him, surprised, "I didn't expect you until nightfall."

"I wanted to ask you some stuff," He said, shyly, eyes darting around the room. There were a few students lying in beds, most of them sleeping. Fortunately Madam Pomfrey was very discrete.

"Certainly, shall we pop into my office?"

It was much nicer than any of the teacher's offices Remus had been in so far. The walls were lined with hundreds of neat and orderly bottles of potions and tonics, it was light and airy, she didn't have a desk and instead of wooden seats there were comfortable armchairs seated either side of a fireplace.

"How can I help, dear?" She asked, settling in, gesturing that he sit down.

"Well," He swallowed, not sure how to begin, "I just... I had a few questions about my... my problem."

She smiled at him, kindly,

"Of course you do, Remus, that's perfectly natural. Is there something specific you would like to know?"

"Yeah. I did a bit of reading, I know there isn't a cure or anything."

"Not yet," She said, quickly, "Advancements are being made all the time."

"Oh, ok. But, for now, I suppose I just want to know... more about it. I don't remember anything when I wake up, just that I get really hungry."

"You'd like to know more about the transformation?"

"No, not just that. Stuff like... does it change who I am, the rest of the time? Does it make me..." He looked down at his hands, at a loss. He wasn't sure what he wanted to say, and there was a hard lump in his throat.

"Remus," Madam Pomfrey said, "This is a condition you have, it isn't who you are."

"I get angry, sometimes," He said, staring into the fire rather than looking her in the face, "I get really, really angry."

"Everyone has emotions, they're perfectly natural. We just learn to control them, over time."

He nodded, taking this in. He couldn't tell her the rest - "When I change, it's getting worse. Harder."

“Yes,” She replied, solemnly, “I did read that it can get worse with the onset of puberty.”

“Oh, ok.” Remus nodded. There was a long pause. “How much worse?”

“I... I couldn’t say. You really are the first of your kind that I’ve treated.”

Another silence. Remus felt no better than he had before; no less confused.

“Would you like to borrow that book I mentioned?”

He nodded, finally bringing himself to look up at her.

* * *

Madam Pomfrey’s book, *Fur to Fangs: Caring for Magical Half-Humans* was moderately more helpful than some of the others Remus had read so far. There was still a lot he couldn’t understand – advanced healing magic and complicated potion recipes, more details on legislation – and even more terrifying; trials and persecution. Conversely, there was a lot he already knew; he had been bitten, and mustn’t be allowed to bite anyone else during a full moon; silver hurt him; there was no cure.

The book did indeed say that with the onset of puberty his transformations would increase in intensity, and that he would become more dangerous afterwards. It did not mention changes in abilities, magical or otherwise, and there was nothing solid referring to changes in mood or temper.

He didn’t consider it particularly interesting or important to know that he had a shorter snout than real wolves or that his tail tufted (he’d rather not think about having either), but he was curious to discover that he was only a threat to humans – particularly wizards. Apparently other animals were in no danger from him – he amused himself thinking that Mrs Norris was safe, at least.

It did not go unnoticed that Remus had withdrawn from the marauders since the attack on Snape.

“Where have you been?” They’d ask, every evening as they all dressed for bed.

“Homework,” he’d shrug, or sometimes “Detention,” – though he hadn’t had another detention since the prank.

The truth was, he was always as far away from other people as he could get. He deliberately tried to stay out of their room until it was time to sleep, and even avoided the common room if he could help it. He felt that until he could control his magic, he’d better not get involved in any more of James and Sirius’ schemes. And they *were* scheming, he knew that for sure. Sometimes at night Remus could hear them sneaking into each other’s beds, then whispering furtively before casting a silencing charm. Other times they crept out with Peter, under the cloak. They always tried to wake Remus, but he ignored them.

During the day he hid away at the back of the library, or else in one of his secret places. He’d found places all over the castle that were small enough to climb inside and go undiscovered for hours at a time. Windows that had been long bricked over, but retained high, broad ledges; small, empty chambers like priest holes concealed behind tapestries; the fifth-floor girls’ bathroom. There he could curl up and read for hours – sometimes he actually did his homework, other times he forced himself to research his condition.

He had another reason to hide. Since the incident, Snape’s hatred towards the marauders had intensified, and he went everywhere with Mulciber, using him as personal protection. If they crossed paths in the hallways Remus always had to be ready with a shielding charm – Mulciber

knew more hexes than Sirius and James combined.

One afternoon, Remus was deep into a book on ancient battle magic – there was a chapter in it on the *Úlfhéðnar*, Germanic wolf-warriors who fought the Romans. He was sitting high up on his favourite on his window ledge and couldn't be seen from the floor unless someone was really looking. He'd climbed up using a rope charm they'd learnt a few weeks ago. He was just about to climb down and go for dinner, when he made a wrong move and knocked the heavy book off the ledge. He winced as it plummeted to the hard stone floor with a deafening thud.

"Who's there?!" A voice came, further up the corridor. He heard footsteps, and with a sinking feeling Remus realised he knew who it was.

"S'just a book." Mulciber said, sounding sullen.

"Yes, but where did it come from?" Snape replied, suspicious. Mulciber huffed,

"The library?"

Snape muttered under his breath, sounding exasperated. Remus pressed as hard as he could against the stone wall.

"Who's up there?" Snape called in his nasal, spiteful voice. Silence. "*Homenum Revelio*."

Remus felt an odd tugging sensation in his stomach and before he knew it, was being pulled from the ledge by an unseen force. He yelped, scrambling for something to hold onto, and ended up dangling from the ledge by his fingertips.

Snape and Mulciber were laughing below.

"Well, well," Snape purred, "If it isn't *Loony Lupin*... where are your little friends, eh? Put you up there and forgotten about you?"

"Piss off, Snape." Remus hissed, losing purchase on the stone, hoping he wouldn't break his ankles when he finally dropped.

"*Igniscopum*!" Snape smirked, pointing his wand. A thin rope of fire shot towards Remus, forcing him to kick off from the wall, landing on his back on the floor, hard.

He blinked, winded, but quickly climbed to his feet, withdrawing his own wand,

"Ok," he said, his back sore from the fall, "You got me. Now go away."

"Why on earth would we do that?" Severus replied, facing him off, raising his wand,

"*Expeli*-"

"*EXPELLIARMUS*" Snape roared, beating him to it. He clutched Remus' wand, gleefully, then added, "*Gelesco*."

Remus felt his feet fuse with the ground, sticking him in place. He groaned – he was stuck now. It might be worth calling for help, but the corridor was a quiet one, and he didn't want to look like a coward. He stared at them both, defiantly, setting his jaw.

"Mulciber," Snape turned to his troll-like companion, "Weren't we just saying the other day, that you need to practice a few hexes more? I feel like this might be the perfect opportunity."

Mulciber grinned, licking his lips. He raised his own wand, not quite as elegantly as Severus, but with the same malicious intent.

“*Lapidus!*”

Nothing happened for a moment, and Remus felt a surge of relief – before suddenly, out of nowhere, a cloud of tiny stones – like gravel – appeared floating in mid-air. It hovered between Remus and Mulciber for a few moments, before beginning to fly at Remus’s face, like a swarm of angry bees. He immediately raised his arms to protect himself, but Severus was too quick;

“*Incarcerous,*” he said, yawning as if bored. Immediately Remus found himself bound tightly by rope, now hardly able to move at all. The stones kept pelting themselves at him and all he could do was shut his eyes. He struggled, knowing it wouldn’t help, but needing to do *something*. He didn’t want to cry, even when he felt a hot trickle of blood slide down his temple.

“What’s going on – Severus?” A girl’s voice came from the end of the hall.

“*Finite Incantatum,*” Snape whispered, hurriedly. The stones stopped at once, the rope vanished, and Remus’ legs came unstuck, all at once. He wobbled and staggered backwards, leaning against the wall.

He looked up in time to see Lily, his saviour, hurrying towards them. She stopped when she saw Remus, who was quickly trying to wipe the blood from his face. She looked at Snape and frowned,

“What are you doing, Sev?”

“Nothing,” he looked at the ground, scuffing the toe of his shoe on the flagstones. “Just chatting to Lupin, weren’t we Mulciber?”

Mulciber shrugged, unconvincingly. Lily looked at Remus, who looked away, embarrassed. Bad enough to be caught by Severus, he didn’t need her feeling sorry for him too. He snatched his wand from Severus quickly, turned and started walking away as fast as he could.

“Wait! Remus!” Lily ran after him. He didn’t stop for her, but she was quick on her feet, and caught him up. She was clutching his battle magic book in one arm, and grabbed hold of him with the other, “Please!” She huffed. He stopped, sighing heavily – he wanted his book back.

“What?” He scowled.

“What were they doing to you? Sev won’t tell me, and I know it was bad.”

“It’s fine,” Remus shrugged, taking his book.

“You’re bleeding!”

“Leave off, Evans,” Remus pushed her away, trying to leave again. She kept hurrying alongside him.

“I told him to stop picking on you, I don’t know why he does it – I mean, you don’t even go around with Potter and Black anymore, I told him that—”

“Why would that matter?!”

“They’re the ones he really wants to annoy – if he knows that you’ve got sick of them too, then—”

“Wait.” Remus stopped still, Lily nearly collided into him. “Are you saying that you’d be ok with

it if Mulciber and Snape was cursing James and Sirius instead of me?!”

“Well,” Lily flushed, “I mean, it would be a fair fight at least. And, you know, they do bring it on themselves, acting the way they do.”

Remus felt even more uncomfortable now. She thought that James and Sirius had attacked Severus both times – she had no idea it was him at all. This confirmed one of his worst fears – Lily thought that Remus only hung around with James and Sirius because he was odd, and because they let him. Did everyone in the castle think he was as pathetic as Peter?

“You’re wrong.” Remus frowned. “Now leave me alone, will you?”

First Year: Astronomy

“Great to have you back, Lupin.” Sirius grinned, pulling back the invisibility cloak as they entered the (previously locked) Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom.

“What d’you mean?” Remus replied, watching James climb the ladder in the corner of the room to reach the highest shelf, where stood a cage of sleeping pixies. “I haven’t been anywhere.”

“Come on, mate,” Peter said, holding the ladder for James, “It hasn’t escaped our notice that you’ve been avoiding us like the plague.”

“I haven’t.” Remus twisted his mouth, “Just been busy. You know, studying and stuff.”

“Well I hope you’re over that phase now,” James laughed, slowly climbing down, clutching the huge cage in both hands, “I’d really appreciate it if you stopped working so hard – it makes *me* have to work hard, you see, and I’m not used to the competition.”

“Oh, do one, Potter.” Sirius snarled, rummaging through drawers and inside desks.

Remus had decided that this prank wouldn’t be too bad – it didn’t require him to use any magic, anyway. If he was completely honest with himself, he had really missed all of their mischief. Being a swot was all well and good, but it wasn’t half *boring*. No wonder Evans was always frowning.

“How are we going to get them into the dining hall?” He asked, bending down to gaze at the tiny blue creatures, still sleeping, curled up at the bottom of the cage. There must have been about fifty of them, which Remus felt was rather cruel. Much better to liberate them.

“Under the cloak,” James replied, spreading it wide now so that they could all get under, “Come *on* Sirius,” he rolled his eyes at the long-haired boy who was now on his hands and knees under the teacher’s desk.

“What are you even looking for?” Peter asked, muffled under the cloak.

“One of the Ravenclaws told me there was a trap door under here.” Sirius sighed, getting up and dusting off his knees. “Liar.”

“This is Black’s newest obsession,” James explained to Remus as he closed the cloak over them and they headed for the door, “Finding secret doors.”

“*Hogwarts: A History* says there are loads of undiscovered passages!” Sirius said, defensively. “Like that one you found, Lupin. There are definitely more, I want to find at least one before we leave.”

“There’s also supposed to be a monster hidden somewhere in the castle.” James whispered back, as they made their way along the halls towards Gryffindor tower. Peter shuddered.

“A risk I’m willing to accept,” Sirius replied, and Remus could hear the grin in his voice, “My legacy is much more important.”

“Typical,” James laughed.

* * *

The next evening at dinner, James was grinning like a maniac, trying to look like he wasn’t hiding

fifty sleeping pixies underneath the table and failing miserably. Peter, who was good at Astronomy, was busy checking over the other marauders' homework, which was to label every star on their chart.

"Honestly," Peter groaned, scribbling something out on Sirius', "You'd think you'd get your *own* bloody star right..."

Sirius laughed,

"What can I say, I'm hopeless."

"You have your own star?" Remus frowned, once again finding himself on the back foot. He never paid any attention in Astronomy – he knew the phases of the moon and that was plenty.

"Sirius." Peter replied, "Come on, Lupin, we've done this. It's the brightest star in the sky? The dog star?" He sighed, looking at Remus' work now, "Yep, you've missed it too." He groaned.

Remus shrugged,

"I just thought it was his name."

"The Noble and most Ancient House of Black has always been a bit arsey with its naming conventions," Sirius mused, "Half of us have astronomical names – there's Bellatrix, of course; my dad's Orion, my brother's Regulus... Mum isn't a star, I think she's an asteroid – pretty apt, if you've ever seen her in a bad mood. Then there's good old uncle Alphard, uncle Cygnus... Andromeda's named after a whole galaxy."

"Wizards are *so weird*," Remus sighed.

"Remus," James sniggered, "You do know that *Lupis* is a constellation too, don't you? The wolf."

"The what?!" Remus felt his heart skip a beat and he nearly choked on his dinner. Sirius slapped him hard on the back, deftly changing the subject;

"If you're nearly finished telling us all how stupid we are, Pete, can we get on with releasing the you-know-what's? My lovely cousins have just started eating, I'd call that perfect timing..."

It really was perfect. James gave the cage a sharp kick to wake up the pixies before sweeping away the cloak and whispering a quick unlocking charm on the cage. There was an explosion of noise and colour and chaos.

Remus hadn't really known what to expect from the pixies – they'd seemed perfectly harmless all night and day while they'd been locked up sleeping under James' bed.

But now he could see exactly why Sirius and James had been so excited. As they burst out from under the table, the tiny creatures scattered in all directions, chattering in high pitched gibberish and zooming back and forth across the great hall. They leapt into plates of mashed potato, squealing with delight, they grabbed plates and cutlery out of students' hands and flung them across the room; they pulled ponytails and tore at parchment.

"Quick!" James ducked under the table, where they all crouched under the invisibility cloak, watching the anarchy unravel around them.

"Brilliant!" Sirius kept saying, "Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant!"

“C’mon,” Remus said, nudging the other boys forward. Their plan had been to observe for a while, then sneak out of the hall as quickly as possible without getting caught.

All four of them awkwardly navigated their way out from under the table – which was made especially difficult by several other students attempting to dive for cover. Fortunately, pixies couldn’t see through invisibility cloaks, and they were left alone.

In the uproar, no one else noticed them either. Girls were screaming, boys shouting, everyone was trying to cover their heads to protect themselves from dive-bombing pixies, or else struggling to grab back their stolen items.

“OH YES!” Sirius suddenly gasped, bursting into fitful laughter.

Remus turned and saw Bellatrix, screaming at the top of her lungs, her wild hair being yanked from side to side by the tiny blue pests, another flitting above her had caught her wand and was waving it at her, zapping blue lightning.

“Get off me! You filthy—you disgusting—you—Aaargh!” She wailed. Narcissa was cowering under the table, clutching her own wand tightly.

Things escalated even further as Peeves the Poltergeist entered the room, zipping about gleefully and causing just as much havoc. He seemed to be directing the pixies, lifting tablecloths and screeching,

“Under here, piskies! Lots of ickle-firsties down here!”

Stifling laughter, the marauders fled from the room when they heard McGonagall’s shrill voice ringing out,

“*Petrificus Totalus!*”

“She’s definitely going to know it was us.” Peter wheezed, as they made their way back to the tower, still under the cloak.

“Nah,” James replied, casually, “I bet she blames it on the Prewetts, they always do big stuff like that. Something to aspire to.”

* * *

“Please.” Sirius said.

“No.” Replied Remus.

“Pleeeeeease!”

“No!”

“Why not?”

“It would just feel... weird! I don’t want you to.”

“But it’ll be fun! I *promise* you’ll enjoy it.”

“Ha.”

The conversation had carried on in much the same way for about three corridors now. Remus

ended up trying to hurry ahead, and heard James chastise Sirius behind him.

“Leave Lupin alone, will you?”

“I will not! This is too important!” Sirius was in a restless mood, which tended to make him extra obnoxious – usually James was the only one who put up with him.

They’d had a long afternoon in the library, completing zodiac charts for their Astronomy revision. Exams were still months away, but James insisted on having a head start. Of course, Sirius had to compete, and Peter had to go anywhere James went. Remus didn’t want to be left out. They had been musing over their star signs, when it had come up that Remus was a Pisces. Sirius had quickly deduced that this meant his birthday was coming up. And so the pleading had begun.

“It’s obviously not that important to Remus,” James hissed at Sirius, “Do something for *my* birthday, if you have to, it’s not long after.”

“You’ll get your turn,” Sirius dismissed him. “But first – Lupin.”

“I really don’t care, Sirius,” Remus sighed, as they reached the portrait of the fat lady. “Don’t make a fuss.”

“But it’s your birthday!” Sirius replied, earnestly, “We *should* make a fuss.”

Remus didn’t see why. No one had ever made a fuss before. There was cake, of course, but sharing a cake with fifty other boys didn’t leave much. Plus all of the little kids insisted on getting a turn to blow out the candles too, so it took forever. Matron wrapped up a few gifts, but they were usually practical – new clothes, socks, underwear, pens and notebooks. Other than that, there was nothing special about the day at all. He was actually looking forward to being away from St. Edmund’s, because he thought that Sirius, James and Peter were probably too well bred to know about the ‘birthday bumps’ – a punch in the arm for each year of age (and one for luck – usually the hardest).

“Why does it matter so much?!” Remus huffed, climbing through the portrait hole. He couldn’t stand it when Sirius was like this – stubborn and persistent.

But when he turned around, he was surprised to see that Sirius was rubbing his arm, looking uncharacteristically hurt.

“You lot all did stuff for my birthday and... well it was really nice. I never much looked forward to it before but... well, it was great, wasn’t it?”

Remus suddenly felt guilty. He realised that Sirius didn’t just want to be the centre of attention again – he was trying to make Remus happy. As if that might make him happy too. Remus had never had much opportunity to give somebody what they really wanted. He relented.

“Oh... ok, fine. But not a big party or anything, just marauders, right?”

“Right.” Sirius grinned, at once his face was transformed, eyes twinkling like stars.

First Year: Twelve

Chapter Summary

Happy birthday, Remus! Cake and cartography :P

Remus' twelfth birthday fell on a Friday that year. Usually on Fridays after lessons James would force them all to go and watch the Gryffindor quidditch practice, and Remus would read quietly to himself. Sirius, however, had managed to convince James that he could miss just one practice – especially as he wasn't even on the team yet – and that Remus might actually want to do something different on his birthday.

He was woken early in the morning by his three dorm mates piling onto his bed, all shouting, "Happy Birthday, Lupin!" They didn't try to punch him, which meant that the day was already off to a head start as his best birthday ever.

At breakfast, James and Sirius marched ahead, pushing other students out of the way as they approached their usual seats, loudly announcing,

"Out of the way, please!"

"Birthday boy coming through!"

"Move along, nothing to see here!"

Remus wanted to hide under the table by the time they'd reached it. His three friends made a huge show of serving him his breakfast, rather than letting him get anything for himself. Peter poured his tea, James loaded up his plate while Sirius buttered his toast.

"Do you have to?" Remus groaned, horribly embarrassed.

"Absolutely," James said.

"Definitely," Peter nodded,

"Unquestionably." Finished Sirius.

Remus shook his head, blushing hard and looking down at his food. When he had finished – which took a while, because he had been served double portions of almost everything – they all stood up, still grinning widely at him.

"What?!" He asked, twitching nervously. If they *were* going to do the birthday bumps, then he hoped it would be over with quickly. Perhaps there was a wizard version? He'd missed Sirius' birthday after all, he didn't know what to expect. Peter and James each put a hand on his shoulder, forcing him to sit down again. Sirius pulled a pitch pipe from his robes pocket and blew a long note. Remus squeezed his eyes shut. Oh no...

"Haaaaaaaahhh-ppy birthday to you!" The three boys bellowed at the tops of their voices, "Haaaah-ppy birthday to youuu! Haaaah-ppy birthday dear Reeeeeeeeeee-mus!"

Now the rest of the hall joined in, and Remus covered his head with his hands,

“Haaaaah-ppy birthdaaaaay tooooooo youuuuuu!”

“Hip hip!” James yelled, standing on his chair,

“Hooray!” The Gryffindors chorused back.

“At least that’s over and done with,” Remus muttered, his face burning as they finished cheering. Peter looked at him with pity,

“Sorry mate, but they’re planning to do the same at lunch and dinner.”

* * *

They still had to sit through Potions as their last lesson of the week – Remus had found that even when he did all of his homework and understood all of the texts he still had no natural talent for potion making. On top of that, it was a boring subject, and Slughorn began to bang on about the five key components of sleeping draughts Remus began to doze off himself.

Snape didn’t bother him – actually, Snape hadn’t so much as glanced in Remus’ direction since the incident in the corridor. Lily flashed him a smile and wished him happy birthday, before rolling her huge emerald eyes as James and Sirius attempted to convince Slughorn not to give them any homework out of respect for the ‘occasion’.

At dinner Remus endured what he hoped was his final round of ‘happy birthday’, which became the loudest yet, largely because Dumbledore was present and began conducting the entire school, bellowing at the top of his own voice. He also received a few cards – one from the whole of Gryffindor house, another from Matron along with a new pair of socks.

After dinner they sat in the common room and Sirius lugged down his heavy record player and put on *Electric Warrior* for the hundredth time since Christmas.

“I was dancing when I was twelve...”

At some point, a cake was produced, with red and gold Gryffindor icing, and twelve pink candles. When Remus cut it open (all the while encouraged to make a wish, but not able to think of one single thing he wanted) he was amazed to find that it was made up of four different flavours – a quarter chocolate, a quarter lemon drizzle, a quarter Victoria sponge and a quarter coffee and walnut.

“Like your toast.” Sirius grinned, looking thrilled at the expression of surprise on Remus’ face, “Thought you might get bored if it was all one flavour.”

“Wow... thanks!”

“So what do you want to do for the rest of the evening?” James asked, “It still looks light enough if you *did* want to go and watch the--“

“He doesn’t, James! Bloody hell, you’re going to have to start developing some other interests, mate, you’re getting boring.”

“I don’t mind if you want to go and watch the quidditch practice.” Remus said, hurriedly, “You’ve already done plenty, honestly. Three songs in one day, what more could a twelve-year-old ask for?”

“No,” James shook his head heroically, “Sirius is right, it’s your birthday, we’ll do something you like doing.”

They were all quiet for a little while, before James cleared his throat, “Err, Lupin? What *do* you like doing?”

Remus thought. He could very easily give a list of things he did *not* enjoy doing; football, homework, flying, potions. But no one had ever asked him before what sort of things he *did* enjoy. He liked watching telly, but so far he hadn’t discovered a TV at Hogwarts. He liked being able to choose what he ate for breakfast and dinner. He liked listening to Marc Bolan singing through Sirius’ record player. None of these things were really hobbies.

“Reading?” Peter said, trying to be helpful, “You read a lot.”

“Do I?!” Remus raised his eyebrows. He hadn’t thought about that, but it was true. Since Christmas, anyway, he’d finished all his set texts for the year and even a few books checked out from the library.

“Oh yeah, great,” James rolled his eyes, “Happy birthday, Lupin, let’s start a book club.”

Sirius sniggered. Pete looked annoyed,

“Well *I* don’t know! Other than reading, you seem to really like detention, Remus.”

Remus laughed at that, holding his hands up apologetically,

“Sorry lads, I reckon I must just be really boring.”

“What about when you disappear off?” Sirius asked, suddenly. Remus balked.

“What do you mean?! I told you, I’ve been sick, I go to the hospital wing.” He hurried.

Sirius waved a hand,

“No, not then – sometimes you go off after lessons, or while we’re watching the quidditch. What are you doing?”

Remus felt himself go red. He’d been wandering off by himself less and less, but clearly his friends had still noticed. They all looked at him, expectantly. He bit his lip,

“I just sort of... walk around.” He said, lamely.

“Where, though?” Peter asked, “In the grounds?”

“Everywhere,” Remus shrugged, “I just like to look about. So I know where stuff is.” He pulled the map out of his back pocket, “It’s stupid, I started adding stuff to the map they gave us at the beginning of the year and whenever I see something interesting I put it in.”

James took the map and unfolded it. The three boys peered over to see. They were quiet for a while. Sirius looked in awe,

“You’ve added all of the portraits... and labelled them and everything.”

“My spelling’s rubbish,” Remus blushed harder, wanting to snatch it back.

James’ face was scrunched up.

“What’s that?” He pointed at a mark Remus had made on one of the staircases.

“One of the trick steps,” Remus replied, “That’s the one you can sink into. That one,” he pointed to a mark on a different step, “is the one that vanishes. The staircases with arrows are the ones that move. I colour-coded so you can see where they end up.”

“Merlin!” Peter exhaled, “D’you have any idea how much time this would save me?! I swear I get trapped on the wrong corridor twice a week because of those flipping stairs.”

“And me,” James said.

“Sod getting to lessons on time!” Sirius burst out, “Please try to recognise the extremely important implications of this map. The possibilities now available to us for practical jokes.”

A smile spread across James’ face, then Peter’s. Remus snatched back the map, folding it up,

“It’s not finished yet. There’s loads to do. I wanted to do some spells on it, once I figure out how.”

“What sort of spells?” Sirius asked eagerly.

Remus hesitated. It wasn’t that he didn’t appreciate Sirius’ interest, or his excitement – but Remus has really wanted to work the map out for himself, as silly as it sounded. After all, Sirius had come up with the reading spell, and the raincloud incantation. For reasons he couldn’t quite explain, Remus had a strong desire to prove that he was just as clever – or just as able – to put in the legwork this time.

“Just some improvements,” he said, cautiously. “You’ll think it’s silly.”

“No we won’t,” Peter replied, earnestly, “We can help!”

“I s’pose... it’s my map, though.”

“Of course it’s yours,” James smiled, soothingly, “Like the cloak is mine, right? But in the service of mischief...”

“It’s the marauder’s.” Sirius finished, his eyes twinkling.

“The marauder’s map.” Remus repeated, still not one hundred percent comfortable with handing over his private project.

“It’s still *yours*, Lupin,” Black continued, “We’ll put your name first and everything!”

“Not sure if we want our names on it...” Peter said, nervously.

“Our nicknames then.” Sirius shrugged.

“We don’t have nicknames.” Remus replied, “Well, I s’pose I sort of do, but I really don’t want ‘Loony Lupin’ written on it.”

The other three burst out laughing. After that Remus decided that it wasn’t so bad, letting them in on his secret. He was actually relieved; he’d been starting to wonder if it wasn’t just some private insanity of his – tracking and logging everything in the castle, getting it down, making sense of it. James, Sirius and Peter seemed less interested in the satisfaction of the task, and more keen on planning their next prank with it.

The rest of the evening was spent under the cloak, roaming the halls. The cloak, in Remus’

opinion, was not strictly necessary, as they were all planning to be back before curfew. But James and Sirius never missed an opportunity to turn even the smallest trip into a full-scale mission, and Peter just enjoyed sneaking about unseen. All became clear, however, when Sirius produced five dung bombs, which they entertained themselves with en route; creeping up behind unsuspecting snogging couples, or dropping them into the pockets of older students hurrying to the library.

Remus showed them what he'd worked out so far, the passages and shortcuts he'd discovered, and even a few of his hidden places (not all of them, of course, just in case). He even told them his plan to put some kind of tracking spell on Mrs Norris, Filch's cat, so that he'd be able to see her coming. They loved that idea.

"Why stop there?" Sirius whispered, as they turned a corner back to the common room at the end of the night, "Why not track everyone?"

"Everyone?"

"Yeah, then we'd know when anyone was coming, we could get away with *anything*."

"I dunno." Remus replied, uncomfortable with the idea. What would happen when his friends saw him travelling down to the Whomping Willow every month? How long before they decided to follow him and got themselves killed? For the first time, Remus realised that the map was not as harmless as he'd first thought.

But James and Peter were busy agreeing with Sirius, saying it was an excellent idea; already imagining being able to see what Dumbledore was up to, or where Snape was lurking. Remus firmly believed that given enough time, Sirius Black and James Potter truly could do anything they wanted – it was just who they were. He just hoped that it would be a long time yet.

First Year: Revision

Time seemed to speed up after Remus' birthday. The days lengthened and spring rushed into the castle, flooding it with sunlight and fresh air after the long winter. Exams loomed, and Remus finally got over his anxiety around reading in public, spending more and more time in the library. Instead of planning new schemes and pranks, the marauders found their evenings devoted to practicing spells and quizzing each other on potion ingredients.

Sirius and James took the exams very seriously; it was a competition to them. Though they both would have denied vehemently, Remus suspected that they both had a desire to defend their pureblood honour – it was too ingrained as an attitude throughout the school, even amongst the teachers. It didn't bother Remus – even if he wasn't getting top marks in everything, he was still doing better than he ever had before. He was actually glad that he had no family to pressure him.

The pressure on Peter was all too evident. He wasn't a bad student by any means – in Herbology and Astronomy he even flourished, often beating James. But he was nervous, and it tended to affect his wand work, making his incantations sloppy. Peter didn't talk about his family very much, but he received a lot of letters from them, and Remus noticed that James was careful around the subject.

"How much do we need to pass the year?" The round face boy would ask desperately, at least four times a day.

"Peter, calm down," James would sooth, "You're going to be fine; you know all the theory backwards now, it's just putting it into practice."

"I don't blame him for being a bit twitchy," Sirius whispered to Remus when the other two were out of earshot, "There've been at least twelve squibs in the Pettigrew family – and that's just this century."

"Squibs?"

"Non-magical wizards." Sirius explained, patiently, "You know how muggle families sometimes have magical kids? It works the other way too – no one likes to talk about it much. My great, great uncle actually had this mad theory that muggles were swapping their children with ours so that they could infiltrate the wizarding world. Completely bonkers, obviously."

"Right." Remus replied, hoping he sounded as if he understood everything Sirius had just said. "So that's why Peter's magic is a bit... wonky?"

"I dunno," Sirius shrugged, "Maybe. I don't know if they can actually *prove* that squibbiness runs in families. But it's the reason the Pettigrews aren't in the sacred twenty-eight."

Remus sighed heavily, fixing Sirius with his most withering look,

"You *know* I don't know what that is."

Sirius smirked,

"Well *I* don't know, Lupin, what with all that reading you do these days. Nice to know there are some things I've got over you."

Remus snorted in reply, looking back at his work. Sirius carried on quickly, as if reluctant to lose

the other boy's attention,

"The sacred twenty-eight are the purest of the pure-bloods. The last remaining 'un-tainted' families."

Remus gave Sirius another mean look. The dark-haired boy held his hands, up, hurrying to explain,

"Their words, not mine! You know I don't believe any of that blood purity rubbish."

"Right," Remus raised an eyebrow. "Bet the Blacks are top of the list, though."

"Actually," Sirius replied, eyes glittering with humour, "The Abbot's are first. It's alphabetical."

Remus groaned and went back to his Potions revision.

* * *

Exams were not at the top of Remus' list of things to worry about. He was relatively sure he would do ok – he'd even checked the examination rules (which were five yards of parchment in length) and confirmed that use of the *Scriboclara* charm for tidying up handwriting was acceptable, as long as the student was able to perform the spell by themselves. Remus had been using the spell since November, and had no concerns.

Two things were worrying Remus far more than passing the year. First, there was the grim knowledge that he would have to return to St Edmund's in June. Though he had only been away for a few months, the difference between St Edmund's and Hogwarts seemed as vast as the difference between monochrome and technicolour. While other students cheerfully looked forward to a long, hot summer full of holidays abroad, relaxation and lie ins, Remus felt as though he was facing exile.

They weren't permitted to perform any magic outside of Hogwarts until they were seventeen, which meant that as well as losing contact with his friends, Remus would no longer be able to read. To him, summer stretched ahead, blank and desolated, punctuated by long angry nights locked away in his cell.

And there was Remus' second problem, ready as always to rear its ugly, hairy snout. As Madam Pomfrey had predicted, since Remus had turned twelve his transformations had become much, much worse. There was no explanation for this in any of the books he read, other than some vague words about adolescence and puberty. Whereas before he might have come away with a few teeth and claw marks – the kind you'd get from a playful puppy who meant no real harm – he now awoke with deep, furious gashes which bled copiously until Pomfrey arrived to staunch them. The agony of the transformation itself reached almost intolerable levels, and he often felt queasy for hours before the moon rose.

To make matters worse, Remus was spending longer stretches in the hospital wing, and it was getting harder and harder to explain away. His friends had started wondering aloud about what on earth could be ailing him – sometimes suggesting he was putting it on to get out of lessons, other times teasing him about being contagious.

At least back at St Edmund's he didn't have any friends who cared where he went every month.

Sirius clearly wasn't looking forward to the summer either. He grew uncharacteristically quiet whenever the upcoming holiday was mentioned, his eyes clouding over, the colour leaving his face. James invited all of them to stay at his for as long as they wanted – but Sirius remained pessimistic.

“You know they’ll never let me.” He sighed.

“Cheer up, mate,” James slung an arm around his friend. They sat together on the big couch in the common room, Peter in arm armchair concentrating on turning a banana into a slipper. It wasn’t working. Remus was lying on the rug in front of the fireplace, on his belly. He had a cut on his back that wasn’t knitting together properly, even after Madam Pomfrey’s ministrations, and had found that this was the only position which wasn’t uncomfortable.

Sirius plainly didn’t want to cheer up.

“They won’t though. Bellatrix’s bloody wedding is in June, you can bet I’ll have to be around for *all* of it.”

“We got an invite to that,” Peter suddenly spoke, looking up from his slipper, which was still bright yellow and looked unpleasantly squishy. “Probably see you there.”

“Yeah, great.” Sirius huffed, exhaling hard so that his long hair fluffed up over his forehead. “If I haven’t been turned into a newt. Or cursed into a portrait for the summer – they actually did that to Andromeda once. She’s never been the same, hates wizard paintings now.”

“*After* the wedding,” James said, tactfully trying to steer the conversation away from the Black family, “Then we’ll work something out. I’ll break you out of there, if I have to, I swear.”

Sirius grinned at James and James grinned back. Their body language mirrored perfectly and Remus felt a pang of loneliness. He knew that there was much more to Sirius’ family problems than just him being the black sheep – there were the scars Sirius had shown him back in September, obviously, but as far as Remus knew, those were perfectly normal. Matron beat him if he acted up, and he’d often got the cane from his muggle teachers – there was no reason for him to suspect that Sirius’ home life was out of the ordinary.

James obviously knew a lot more about it. Remus could tell, because it was the one thing Potter never teased Sirius about – family. They talked a lot at night, the pair of them – Remus had heard Sirius crying more than once. It made him want to cast his own silencing spell; he hated the sound of tears, and rarely cried himself.

“You too, Lupin,” James was saying,

“Hm?” Remus lifted his head from his thoughts. He arched his back carefully and tried not to grimace when the pain split his back like a bolt of lightning.

“You should come and stay over the summer. We’ve got loads of room, and mum doesn’t mind.”

“Can’t,” Remus shook his head, looking back down at his book. His back was on fire. “Matron won’t let me. Legal guardian stuff, muggle law.”

“There’ll be a way around it,” James replied, confidently. “Both of you are coming, right? I’m making it happen.”

Remus smiled, but knew there was nothing James could do. The full moons were due at the end of each month as they always were, and there wasn’t enough of a window even for a week at the end of the summer. Besides, Matron really wouldn’t let him.

“I think I’ve done it!” Peter gasped, suddenly, holding his bright yellow slipper aloft.

“Well done, Pete,” Sirius said, dully. “Try it on to see if it fits.”

Remus sat up, his back now very painful indeed. As he straightened, he felt a warm slither of blood run down his spine and soak into the waistband of his trousers. Alarmed, he stood up, quickly.

“Eurgh!” Peter yelped, withdrawing his bare foot from the slipper, covered in sticky banana slime. James burst out laughing, his glasses falling askew,

“He was *joking*, Pete! You’ve got to stop doing stuff just because we tell you to.”

“You ok, Lupin?” Sirius looked up, suddenly. Remus was dithering on the rug. He had to get to the hospital wing right away, but he had no idea how to explain himself.

“Yeah, just... think I might go for a walk.”

“Where? It’s almost curfew,” Sirius’ face lit up, “What are you planning?”

“No no, nothing... I just fancied...”

“We’ll come!” James stood up too, “I’ll get the cloak.”

“No!” Remus shouted.

They all froze, even Peter, who was halfway through picking banana strings from between his toes.

“I...” Remus stammered, “I don’t feel well. I just want to go to Madam Pomfrey, that’s all.”

“All right, mate,” James held up his hands gently, “Calm down. Want us to come with you anyway?”

“I’ll go.” Sirius said, quickly. He stood up and took Remus by the elbow, steering him towards the portrait hole before the other two could say anything.

“Sirius...” Remus started, once they were out in the empty corridor,

“S’all right, Lupin, I’m just walking you there. Won’t go in with you or anything.”

Remus looked at him, confused, then nodded and started walking, as quickly as his sore back would let him. He knew Sirius well enough now to know that there was no changing his mind. Peter might have let his nerves get the better of him and run back. James might have respected his wishes. But Sirius; Sirius always had to push it.

“Are you all right?” Sirius asked, eyeing him, “You’re walking stiffly.”

“I don’t feel well.” Remus repeated, through gritted teeth. He hoped Sirius would just think he was angry with him, and not realise that he was actually biting back a growl of pain.

“Ok.” Sirius replied, smoothly. They continued walking in silence. When they finally reached the hospital wing, they stood outside awkwardly for a few minutes, Remus’ hot amber eyes glaring into Sirius’ cool blue stare as if daring him to ask a question.

“Hope you feel better.” Was all Sirius said. “Can we come and visit you tomorrow, if you’re not out?”

“S’pose so.” Remus said, warily. He tried to shrug, then winced. Sirius’ expression did not flicker.

“Look after yourself, Lupin.” He said, quietly, before turning and hurrying back the way they’d come.

Remus watched him go, until he turned the corner. He had the strangest feeling that Sirius would glance back at him before disappearing. When he didn't, Remus couldn't help but feel strangely disappointed, though he ought to have known better – Sirius Black was never predictable.

He shivered, slightly – partly because of the mounting pain, and partly because of something else – then pushed open the hospital door.

First Year: End of Term

Chapter Summary

First year draws to a close...

Chapter Notes

Homophobic slur towards the end of this chapter.

Remus would never tell anyone, but he really enjoyed the Hogwarts exam period. There were no lessons for a whole two weeks and while everyone else ran around like a headless chicken, Remus felt very relaxed about the whole thing.

The same could not be said for the rest of his classmates. Lily Evans had taken to ambushing other students in the library and common rooms, demanding that they quiz her on the 18th Century Goblin Riots. Peter seemed to be constantly muttering to himself under his breath, wringing his hands together. Marlene McKinnon and Mary McDonald, two Gryffindor first years Remus usually tried to avoid, kept bursting into fits of hysterical giggles from the nerves. James and Sirius appeared to be acting out with more bravado than ever; setting off flameless firecrackers in the corridors and performing vanishing spells on unsuspecting student's book bags in the library. Remus couldn't tell if the two of them were just responding to the general atmosphere of anxiety, or whether they were expelling their own nervous energy.

The older students had no sympathy for their younger counterparts. Frank Longbottom gave out more detentions during the last week of term than he had all year, and even threatened to take fifty points from Gryffindor if James and Sirius didn't stop levitating inkwells in the common room. Remus felt that they had got off easy – Bellatrix Black actually cursed half of the Slytherins one evening for talking too loudly while she studied for her NEWT's. They couldn't speak for three days – Madam Pomfrey had to grow their tongues back.

Their first exam was Charms, which had Remus off to a good start. All they had to do was bewitch a coconut to dance an Irish jig, which he privately thought was very easy. He, James and Sirius managed without a problem, though Peter's coconut at first refused to move at all, then lost control once it finally got going and ended up spinning off the desk, smashing all over the flagstones.

Transfiguration went almost as well, though it was a trickier subject. Their task was to turn a stag beetle into a pepper shaker – Sirius completed this in minutes, barely concealing his pride as McGonagall commented that it was the best example of small scale transfiguration she'd ever seen from a first year. Remus' shaker wasn't too bad, though it was still shiny and black, whereas Sirius had somehow managed to make his glass. James attempted porcelain, and seemed to have done well until McGonagall tried to shake some pepper out of it and it spread its wings and flew out of the window, causing Marlene and Mary to shriek. Peter's pepper pot still had legs and antlers, even after an hour.

Herbology and History of Magic were both written exams. Remus surprised himself by writing the longest history essay in the class – he had to ask Peter, sitting next to him, for extra parchment. Apparently there was plenty to be said about the goblin riots after all. Potions was easier than he expected – they had to brew a cure for warts from memory. Having a very good memory from years of practice, Remus knew he had all of the ingredients and quantities right, even if his preparation skills were lacking precision.

Between exams, Remus enjoyed his last weeks of freedom either wandering the halls and adding to his map (when he was alone) or eating ice cream outside by the lake (when the others were with him). He'd recently found a corridor that smelled vaguely of chocolate, but couldn't work out what that meant – it was nowhere near the kitchens.

The days were much warmer now, and as June opened up and the testing came to a close, the marauder's minds turned to mischief.

"It's got to be big," James said, decisively. He was always making unnecessary statements like that, waiting for someone else to come up with an idea for him to approve. "Our last hurrah."

"Not our last," Sirius replied, picking at the grass. "We'll be back in two months."

"You lot might be," Peter worried, "I know I've failed everything."

James waved a hand, dismissing Peter's fears. It was too warm and lazy of a day to spend long reassuring him. They were lounging in their new favourite spot, near a tree by the lake. Peter was sitting under the shade cast by the branches because he was fair and burnt easily. James and Sirius had stripped off their robes and rolled up the sleeves of their brilliant white uniform shirts to combat the heat. Remus simply lay in the sunshine, robes still on to cover up his freshest injuries, enjoying the warmth sinking into his aching joints. He liked the spot because the Whomping Willow was behind them, so they didn't have to look at it.

"Have we got any dung bombs left?" Remus asked, squinting up at the blue sky, then closing his eyes to look at the patterns burned into his retinas.

"Yeah, a few. Not enough for a big send off, though."

"How big are you thinking, exactly?"

"Bigger than dung bombs," James replied, cleaning his glasses, as he often did when he was thinking. "Big enough so that everyone knows it was us."

"They'll know it's us. McGonagall always knows," Sirius put in, standing up and skimming a stone across the lake. It bounced five times – Sirius was amazing at skimming stones. He had this fluid sort of grace that was more animal than human. It drove Remus mad – after all, *he* was the one that wasn't strictly human, and he had all the natural grace of a flobberworm.

"They might think it's the Prewetts," James shot back, "They've been beating us all year."

"Nothing beat the pixies!" Sirius said, defensively. He threw another stone. This time, on its fourth bounce, a long, silvery tentacle rose from the water and batted it back towards him, lazily. Sirius grinned.

"And the itching powder was pretty good, you have to admit," Remus murmured, flinging an arm over his face.

"Exactly," Sirius continued, enthusiastically, "You've got to give us points for ingenuity there."

“And the raincloud!” Peter piped up, eager to be involved. They all fell quiet. Remus sat up. They hadn’t talked about that incident at all since January. Peter gnawed his lip, realising what he’d done.

Sirius shook his head, changing the subject,

“Anyway, the point is, the four of us have had more detentions than the rest of Gryffindor combined this year. What more do you want us to do, James? Sign our work?”

He pulled back his arm to throw the stone back into the lake, but James leapt up and grabbed his shoulder, causing him to drop it.

“Oi!” Sirius frowned, annoyed, “What are you playing at?”

“That’s it!” James jumped, excitedly, “We *sign our work!*”

“You what?” Remus squinted at both of them. He wished he hadn’t stared at the sun for so long, his eyes were fogged over and he was starting to get a headache.

“SIGN OUR WORK.” James repeated, as if he was making perfect sense and they were all too thick to get it. He sighed, impatient, “We put our mark on Hogwarts, literally.”

“Are you talking about defacing school property, Potter?” Sirius arched a dark eyebrow, joy written all over his face.”

“I might just be, Black.” James wiggled his own eyebrows in return – he couldn’t raise just one, like Sirius could.

“Well, I say, old man.” Sirius grinned, adopting an even more plummy, aristocratic accent than usual.

“What *do* you say, old bean?”

“I say it’s a simply ripping idea.”

“Oh, spiffing!”

“Good show!”

“*Rather!*”

They both dissolved into giggles, falling on the ground and wrestling. Remus and Peter shared a look. This sort of thing was happening more and more; James and Sirius would get caught up in one of their own plays and leave the others behind. Remus stood and went over to sit with Peter.

“Any idea what they’re on about?” He asked the smaller boy. Peter was red in the face, his forehead creased. He was clearly thinking deeply.

“They want us to write our names somewhere. On the walls?” He said, slowly.

“What,” Remus asked, “Like... carve it into the stone or something? That’s a bit permanent, innit?”

Sirius and James continued wrestling. James was larger and usually had the upper hand, but Sirius fought dirty.

“S’all I can think of,” Peter shrugged. “James says he wants it big... the walls are the biggest... oh... OH!” He jumped up, “Lads!” He squeaked, “I’ve had an idea!”

“Blimey!” James and Sirius stopped at once. James had Sirius in a headlock, and Sirius’ ankle was just inching around James’, ready to yank and topple them both. “Are you feeling ok, Pettigrew?”

“The lawn!” Peter continued, pacing as he thought out loud, “It’s the biggest canvas, and it wouldn’t have to be permanent, it could be... if we used a quick-gro potion...”

Remus sighed, deeply. Why wasn’t anyone making any sense today?

* * *

And so it was down to James’ desire for notoriety, and Peter’s desperation to prove himself, that all four of them found themselves back out in the grounds after dark on the last day of term. They’d had two weeks to plan it – hoarding supplies from the greenhouse and learning various colour changing incantations. In the meantime, they learnt that they had all passed their exams; even Peter. Remus had come first in History of Magic, and second in Charms (to Lily Evans, which he tried not to let bother him).

“Ouch! That was my foot!”

“Sorry!”

“I can’t see a thing.”

“It’s dark out, idiot.”

“Ouch! That was *my* foot!”

“Can we take the cloak off now?”

“Yeah, I think so...”

They had dragged a heavy sack of hydrangea seeds all the way down from the tower. Well, Remus and Peter had. Sirius and James decided that they would lead the way.

“Right.” James said, business-like, hands on his hips, “Did we agree to write ‘love’, or ‘from’?”

“From.” Peter said.

“I prefer ‘Love’.” Sirius said.

“Aww, ‘course you do, Black,” James ruffled his hair playfully, causing Sirius to duck and pull a face. “Love it is, then. C’mon gentlemen, to work!”

An hour later, the sack of seeds was empty, and Remus was following the trail the others had left, drizzling the ‘quick-gro’ potion over the ground.

“Are we sure we spelled everything right?” James scratched his head, messing up his hair even more.

“Too late now,” Sirius replied, wiping sweat from his brow. “Look, we’d better go, sun’s coming up.” He pointed to the sky, which was beginning to glow pink.

“The colour changing spell, quick!”

“I did it already,” Remus said, finishing the last of the potion. “While they were still in the bag.”

“Good thinking, Lupin!” Sirius slapped him on the shoulder, “Knew you were the logical one.”

Since when?! Remus thought to himself.

“Let’s not go in yet,” James said, “Look, we can watch the sun rise.”

“Merlin,” Sirius laughed, “You big poof.”

They did watch, though, in awe as the glowing orange sun slowly climbed over the horizon, flooding the great lake with golden sparks, then paling as it rose higher into the parchment coloured sky.

“Next year’ll be even better, lads,” James grinned, his glasses reflecting the new sun as he threw an arm each around Peter and Sirius. Remus stood slightly off to the side, content just to stand with them.

They headed back to the castle in a strange mood, and almost forgot to put the cloak back on. They returned to Gryffindor tower, and James and Peter tried to sleep, but Remus couldn’t. For one thing, Sirius had finally begun packing – he’d been putting it off for a week now, and began throwing his things carelessly and noisily into his mahogany trunk. It was embossed with a serpent, like so many of Sirius’ things.

For another thing, Remus didn’t want to sleep. His last few hours at Hogwarts were draining away so quickly, and he didn’t want to miss any of them. He sat on the windowsill and watched their prank developing in the grass below. The seeds were already taking root and growing very quickly, twisting and writhing below like something in a science fiction film.

“Looking good!” Sirius said, coming over to look. He’d apparently finished packing, though his trunk didn’t look like it would close properly.

“Still think it should have been ‘woz’, not ‘were’.” Remus said.

“Bad grammar, Lupin,” Sirius yawned, “Couldn’t have lived with myself.” He stretched sleepily and backed onto Remus’ bed, which happened to be nearest, curling up to sleep.

Remus looked at him for a while from his window ledge. With his eyes closed, in the gentle dawn light, Sirius seemed softer, younger. Remus had spent the whole year in awe of him and James; how invincible they were, how daring. But they were all just kids together, really. And no matter how big their final prank was, it wouldn’t stop the train coming for them tomorrow, to take Remus back to St Edmund’s and Sirius back to wherever it was he lived – a house where the portraits shouted at him, and his family didn’t care that he had come top in Transfiguration.

He looked out of the window again, pressing his forehead to the cool glass and sighing deeply. It was a really good prank; they all ought to be proud. McGonagall would throw a fit. Dumbledore would probably like it. There was no need to feel so gloomy, it was only two months.

Fifty feet below, the hydrangeas finally bloomed, and Remus’ heart skipped a beat. The gaudy flowers flashed below in Gryffindor colours, bright crimson and glimmering gold, blaring out their wonky-lettered message.

THE MARAUDERS WERE HERE!

Summer, 1972

Dear Remus,

How's your summer so far? Mine is rubbish.

Last week was Bellatrix's wedding – at least she won't be at Hogwarts next year. Regulus and I were groomsmen and had to wear **green** dress robes. Definitely not my colour. My whole family was there, it was awful. You should have seen what Bella did to her hair, she looked completely mental. Cissy has dyed hers, too – blonde, so she looks like her stuck up boyfriend, Malfoy. I can't believe my aunt let her, I bet my mum wouldn't let me dye *my* hair.

I wish we could do magic out of school, I've been researching curses in dad's library – should have some excellent stuff for Snivellus next year.

James says his parents are letting me stay with them this summer. My parents won't let me go to the Potters, but they *might* let me stay with the Pettigrews, so I'm getting Pete to invite me. James said he'd invite you too, I hope you can come. It'll be great, just like school.

See you soon,

Sirius O. Black

* * *

Dear Remus,

Hope you're having a good summer, and the muggles aren't getting you down.

Mum and Dad say you're more than welcome to come for a visit. Sirius is trying to wrangle the whole summer, which would be brilliant. If you can come, reply to this owl ASAP. Mum says she'll write a letter herself if your Matron needs her to.

Best,

James.

* * *

Dear Remus,

James and Sirius say they've tried to get in touch with you, but you haven't replied. I told them maybe you didn't know how owls worked. You just tie the letter to their foot, like we've done, then let it go. They usually end up where they're supposed to.

Hope you can come to visit.

Peter.

* * *

Dear Remus,

Are you all right? We haven't heard anything from you, I hope you haven't tried to use muggle

post. I'm at the Potters now, it's great. His parents are really nice, nothing like mine.

James is being a bit of a pain. He thinks we're both getting on the quidditch team this year and keeps getting me up at six to practice flying. Completely bonkers. It's sort of fun though, and if Gryffindor needs a beater then I might try for it. I can't wait to show you my broom, you can have a go on it if you want – you might like flying better if you have decent equipment.

James reckons your Matron won't let you come – do you think if we wrote to Dumbledore or McGonagall then they could get permission? You're a wizard, after all, you shouldn't get stuck with muggles all summer.

If you really can't come, are you going to Diagon Alley for your school things? Maybe we could all meet there in August?

Hope you're ok.

Sirius O. Black.

* * *

Dear Remus,

It's not the marauders without you, please come! We've got loads of room, and Mum doesn't mind. I've been training Sirius and Pete for quidditch next year – I reckon that if we get you over your problem with heights then you might make a decent beater.

You like hitting things, don't you? And you're probably the strongest of the four of us, so I reckon it makes sense. Sirius wants to be a beater too, he can show you how to do it. I'll even see if we've got my old broom still lying around in the shed, and you can have it!

James.

* * *

Dear Remus,

Please come and save us from James' reign of terror. I don't even want to be on the quidditch team.

Peter.

* * *

Dear Remus,

I hope you're getting these letters. We're starting to get worried about you.

We all went to Diagon Alley together, it was great. James' mum bought us ice creams and let us go wherever we liked. Probably spent about three hours in *Quality Quidditch Supplies*. I really wanted to get out into muggle London and find a records shop, but we weren't allowed to leave the alley.

Andromeda sent me this new album – Merlin, you really have to hear it, Lupin! It's better than Electric Warrior. Better than ANYTHING. I'm sure the singer is actually a wizard – have you heard of David Bowie?

Are you having a good summer? What's it like being back?

Write soon!

Sirius O. Black.

* * *

Dere Sirius,

Pleas dont send me more letters. Can't read them and matron getting anoyed by the owls.

See you on the train.

Remus.

Second Year: Regulus Black

Metal Guru, could it be?

You're gonna bring my baby to me

She'll be wild, y'know a rock n roll child...

Remus gripped the handles of his battered old suitcase with white knuckles, his stomach turning excited somersaults as he watched the bustling crowds. Matron had let him run at the barrier this time, though she looked away at the last minute, terrified. Now she was far behind him, on the muggle side of the station, and he didn't have to see her again for ten months.

He'd had a terrible nightmare the night before that they would arrive at King's Cross and be unable to get through to platform 9 ¾ - none of it had been real; magic, wands, wizards, his friends. But Remus tried to push these thoughts from his mind as he gazed eagerly about himself, looking for a familiar face.

"Let you come back, did they?" A cold voice interrupted his search. "Standards must really be dropping."

Remus felt his shoulders tense. Why did the first person he spoke to have to be Snape?!

"Get lost, Snivellus." He spat. He squared up, turning to face the Slytherin boy with his meanest look.

"Ugh, what on earth is that smell?" Snape drawled, wrinkling his over-large nose. Remus coloured – he stank of antiseptic, he knew it; Matron had been much too liberal that morning.

"I said get lost!" Remus murmured, clenching his teeth and balling up his fists.

He saw Severus recoil, slightly. Remus knew how he looked – he'd had two months without magic, surrounded by bigger and tougher boys than Snape. He was wound as tight as a bear trap and ready to throw a punch at the smallest provocation.

"Oi, baldy!" Another voice sounded over the crowd. A boy with glasses and jet black hair sticking up at all angles was leaning out of one of the carriage windows, waving madly at Remus.

Remus smiled, forgetting that he was trying to frighten Severus, and waved back. He rubbed his head self-consciously. His hair had grown out while he was at Hogwarts, but Matron had shaved it all off as soon as he was back at St Edmund's, making him look like a thug again.

Casting a filthy look at Snape, Remus clutched his suitcase and hurried onto the train, pushing past other students to reach the carriage where his friends were waiting.

"Lupin!" Peter jumped up, excited. He didn't quite know what to do with himself once he was on his feet – they certainly weren't going to *hug* like girls, and apparently handshakes weren't in order. Pettigrew awkwardly patted his on the arm instead, and Remus gripped his in return.

"Hiya lads," Remus smiled, his cheeks aching with happiness as he sat down. "How's it been?"

"We should be asking you!" James laughed, punching him in the arm. "Not one owl all summer!"

Remus glanced at Sirius, furtively. He hadn't mentioned the letter Remus had sent him, then.

“You know I’m practically a muggle over the holidays,” he replied, “Couldn’t even get into my trunk to do homework; they locked it up.”

That wasn’t strictly true – Remus had asked Matron to lock away his school things, terrified the other boys would get to them. The homework he hadn’t done because he hadn’t been able to. There was a quiet noise of disgust from the corner. Remus looked up, frowning.

Sitting on the seat beside Sirius was another, younger boy, with the same deep blue eyes and long dark hair; the same unmistakeable Black features – full lips and cheekbones that could cut glass.

“This is Reg.” Sirius nodded, offhandedly, “Say hello, Reggie.”

“It’s *Regulus*.” The boy replied, irritably, his high aristocratic voice indignant.

“My darling brother,” Sirius raised his eyebrow at the other three.

“Hi Regulus,” James smiled, offering a friendly hand, “I’m James.”

“Potter.” Regulus looked down at his hand as if it was filthy.

Sirius slapped him around the head,

“Stop being such a little prick.” He snapped, “These are my friends.”

“I didn’t *want* to sit here.” Regulus replied. “You made me.”

“Oh, go on, piss off, then. Dunno why I bothered.”

Regulus stood up, stony faced, and exited the car, slamming the door behind him.

“Wow, he really has that Black family charm,” James grinned. Sirius shook his head, despairingly, propping a foot up on the bench opposite and leaning an elbow against the window pane. The whistle blew and the train began to pull out of the station.

“Shouldn’t have expected anything else,” Sirius muttered, “He’s totally brainwashed. And annoyed with me. I shouldn’t have been gone all summer.”

“Reckon he’ll be in Slytherin, then?” James sympathised.

“Probably.” Sirius glowered, “He knows I won’t talk to him, if he is. Rather he was in Hufflepuff.”

Remus thought this was a bit harsh. Certainly, he disliked Snape and Mulciber – and yes, they’d played some pranks on Slytherin house, but Remus had never *hated* Slytherin like Sirius seemed to. Surely he wouldn’t disown his own brother just because they had a slightly different uniform? The only thing Remus could see wrong with the Slytherins was that most of them were snobs – and Sirius, James and Peter were snobs too, though they didn’t realise it.

This train of thought left him as they began to gather speed out of London, and Remus could finally relax into the idea that he was indeed returning to Hogwarts – and that magic was now officially permitted. He yanked open his suitcase and grasped his wand for the first time in months. Remus hadn’t dared touch anything magical since the end of term, but now he pulled out one of his second-hand books (they had arrived the week before from Dumbledore), opened it, and quickly performed *Letiuncula Magna*.

He pretended he was scratching behind his ear with the wand, and muttered the words under his breath. Sirius must have seen what he was doing, because he had jumped up to pull his broom

down from the luggage rack, distracting James and Peter. Remus looked down at the book, his heart racing. The words filled his mind like music, and finally he could read again.

The summer had been incredibly dull. He'd attempted to read some of the books lying around St Edmund's, but without magic it was too frustrating. He'd very slowly got through each of the letters from his friends, but was much too embarrassed to attempt writing back to anyone but Sirius. He'd also had to lie low a lot. Remus felt as though he had passed whole days sometimes without speaking to anyone; the other boys had been told that he'd been away at a private boarding school, paid for by his father's will. This of course made him more of a target than ever, and combined with his increasingly difficult full moons, Remus had spent much of the summer covered in bruises.

Full moons were another reason he was relieved to be returning to Hogwarts, where Madam Pomfrey, the school's medi-witch, was not only more sympathetic than Matron, but better qualified to handle the peculiarities of his condition. Matron had been horrified to see the new injuries Remus inflicted on himself each month, and treated him as though he had done it deliberately, just to annoy her. It had been much worse than the summer before, when he had got away with a few scratches and bruises each night. Now, underneath his muggle clothes, Remus was almost covered in bandages and plasters which pulled and chafed whenever he moved. He hoped he would be able to slip off to the hospital wing soon after they arrived.

Sirius and James were busy telling Remus about their own summer, with Peter joining in here and there, keen to make it clear that most of the time it had been the three of them. It sounded as though they'd all had a spectacular time, even if there was a lot of quidditch. James' parents had a cottage by the seaside, as well as what James called their 'usual home' near London. The three boys had camped out on the beach, fished, flown kites and plotted their pranks for the year ahead. They chattered about it excitedly for so long that Remus felt like telling them all to shut up.

He felt a bit better when the trolley came around – James and Sirius pooled their pocket money and bought enough to feed half of Gryffindor house. Remus had no complaints – as usual, he was very hungry.

* * *

Remus was immensely glad that he had stuffed his face on the train, because he had forgotten how long and drawn out the sorting ceremony was, especially when you weren't taking part in it. Regulus was indeed sorted into Slytherin, which came as a surprise only to Sirius, who Remus heard exhale sharply in disbelief. The younger Black brother scurried over to join his peers, and Narcissa, who was now sporting a silver prefect badge as well as a new sleek platinum hairdo.

Severus patted Regulus on the back, sneering over at the Gryffindor table.

"What is his *problem*?!" Peter sighed as the food finally appeared, "You'd think he'd get over a few stupid pranks."

"More like he needs to get over Evans," James said, sounding uncharacteristically pensive. They all looked at him in confusion. "Oh come on, it's obvious!" He grinned, "Ol' Snivellus is clearly madly in love with a certain carrot-topped Gryffindor," he winked at Lily, who gave him a disgusted look and very obviously turned her back on him to continue her conversation with Marlene.

"So because we got the bird he fancies, he's going to be a pain in the arse for the next six years?" Sirius replied, disbelieving.

Remus blinked at him. *Bird?! Sirius* was not the sort of boy who called girls 'birds', he was far too upper class. Where on earth had he heard that?

"Exactly." James confirmed, looking very proud of himself.

"Nah," Sirius shook his head, "No one could care *that much* about a girl."

Remus silently agreed with him. Still, Potter didn't seem to mind having his theories disputed. He shrugged, digging into his roast potatoes,

"If you say so. Must still be annoyed about that time Remus punched him, then."

Sirius laughed at the memory of that, finally cheering up.

Second Year: The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars

Madam Pomfrey was horrified by the state of Remus' skinny, battered frame when he finally went to see her.

"What has that woman been *doing* to you?!" She gasped, angrily.

"Oh no, I did all this myself," Remus gestured dryly at his bare chest. The nurse tutted, peeling away another bandage.

"Yes, but she's barely done anything to treat you... I had no idea muggle medicine was so primitive! These are magical wounds, they need magical care!"

Remus nodded, tiredly. He'd grown used to the carnage now, the pain had settled on his shoulders like a heavy burden – one he thought he would probably just have to bear. Life was full of limitations, he simply had more than others. Perhaps that was why he was so drawn to James and Sirius.

Madam Pomfrey wanted to observe him over night, but he refused, grumpily. The full moon was two weeks away and he wanted to sleep in his own bed as much as possible.

He walked back to the common room slowly, though he was feeling better than he had in a month – Madam Pomfrey had given him a potion that made him feel loose and comfortable, and pleasantly light headed. There was no chance of a quiet afternoon, though, for when Remus reached the dormitory he found Sirius sitting on his bed, the record player and brand new albums spread around him.

"Lupin!" He beamed, excitedly, "You have to hear this!"

"Thank merlin you're here," James groaned from his own bed, where he was flipping through a quidditch magazine. "He's been banging on about that muggle singer all summer."

"He's *not* a muggle!" Sirius snapped, hands on his hips, "He has to be a wizard. Has to be! You should see the clothes he wears..."

Remus crossed the room and picked up the record sleeve. He smiled, mildly surprised,

"Oh, Bowie! Yeah, I like him. I don't think he's a wizard, though,"

Sirius looked mildly disappointed that Remus had heard of him, and Remus hurriedly explained, "I've heard *Starman* a lot, on the radio, but no one at St Eddy's has the album!"

Placated, Sirius settled the black disk he was holding onto the turntable and fixed the needle in place. James sighed deeply and got up, leaving the room, magazine under his arm. Sirius ignored him, watching Remus' face eagerly as the slow drumbeat began. Remus sat down on the edge of the bed and closed his eyes to listen.

Pushing through the market square

So many mothers sighing

News had just come over

We had five years left of crying...

It wasn't the same as *Electric Warrior*; it was darker, moodier. Remus liked it a lot. There was a story in it, though he wasn't sure he understood all the parts yet. As the closing bars of *Rock n Roll Suicide* reverberated, Sirius lifted the needle and moved it back,

"Listen to *Suffragette City* again, that's my favourite!"

Remus smiled – he could have guessed that. It was loud and rude, and you could dance to it. *This mellow thigh'd chick's just put my spine outta place...*

For himself, he thought he liked *Moonage Daydream* best, because it was weird and spacey. Or *Lady Stardust*, because for some reason it reminded him of Sirius. – *his long black hair, his animal grace; the boy in the bright blue jeans...* Remus quickly dismissed that thought, sure that Sirius would find it hysterically funny.

Once they'd played the album all the way through again, and then re-played their favourites, it was almost dinner time. They sat cross legged together on the bed, pouring over the album notes.

"Maybe he *is* a wizard," Remus conceded, dreamily, "He's not like a normal muggle."

"Told you!" Sirius smirked triumphantly, "I'm going to get more, too, all of his albums."

"T.Rex had a new one," Remus said, "*Slider*."

"Cool! I wish Mrs Potter had let us leave Diagon Alley, I even got some muggle money from Gringotts."

"What is Diagon Alley?" Remus asked, though he thought he had some idea from the summer letters.

Sirius' eyes widened, as they always did when Remus demonstrated his shocking lack of wizarding knowledge.

"Bloody hell, Lupin," he tutted, "It's a wizard street, in London. Muggles can't get in – like Hogsmeade."

"Oh, right." It didn't sound that exciting to Remus; shopping was boring.

"Where do you get all of your stuff?!"

"What stuff?"

"School stuff – your books, your robes..." Sirius' eyes darted to the fraying cuffs of Remus' black school robes. His own were brand new, immaculately finished and cut slightly better than everyone else's.

"Second hand, I think," Remus replied, "Dumbledore sends them. Dunno how I'd get to a wizard street; I'm not allowed into London alone."

"Next summer." Sirius said, firmly, "You have to come to James' place and stay, we can take you to Diagon Alley, you'll love it."

"You know I can't," Remus said quietly, not making eye contact.

"We'll sort it." Sirius said, with confidence, "Talk to Dumbledore, McGonagall – the Minister for Magic, if we have to!"

Remus forced a smile, pretending that he believed Sirius,

“Yeah, great. Thanks, Black.”

* * *

The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars became the soundtrack to the Gryffindor boy’s dormitory for the next week, until even James – who was tone deaf – found himself humming along.

Remus had never felt so satisfied and at ease in his entire life. He was away from St Edmund’s, away from grey shirts and Matron and locked rooms and troubled boys who wanted to get him. He wasn’t covered in bandages (at least for the moment), and until lessons began on Monday he had all the time he wanted to read, listen to music and muck about with the marauders.

He spent most of time catching up on his reading and completing the summer homework they’d been set. Like a starving man, he devoured every piece of information presented to him, and even went to get more books from the library to investigate further.

He also had to have a number of conversations with James before he could convince him that he had no desire to be on the Gryffindor quidditch team. Remus was content to sit in the stalls with his book, occasionally glancing up to watch the other three boys flitting back and forth on their brooms. They were all very good, but it was obvious even to Remus that James was the best of all three. He didn’t even look like he needed the broom; the black haired boy soared like a kestrel, his turns smooth, his dives nauseatingly sharp. Remus hadn’t attended many quidditch matches in his first year, but he felt sure that James would earn a place on the team.

Sirius was much showier in his flying technique – he didn’t lack James’ skill so much as his discipline. Black appeared to get bored easily, he could go quite fast when he wanted too, but was more interested in looping and swerving dangerously than catching quaffles or repelling bludgers. He needed James to shout at him every few minutes to keep focussed on the game. Peter was very competent after a summer of drills, but he was quite slow over long distances – James decided he might be better off as a keeper.

“You’re acting as if you get to hand pick the whole team.” Sirius huffed as they headed back to the castle after one practice.

“They ought to let me.” James shrugged, as if it was obvious, “I’m better than at least half of the current team, and you’re better than both beaters. *And* I know tactics.”

“Just try not to be too shocked when they don’t make you captain,” Sirius rolled his eyes, “You’re still a second year. There weren’t any second years on the team at all last year.”

“Have some faith, Black,” James winked, throwing his arm over his friend’s shoulder. They strode ahead together, brooms in hand. The sun was setting behind them and threw everything into sharp relief, outlining the two dark haired boys in heroic gold. Remus watched them, lagging behind and weighed down by his books, thinking that they would probably all be a little bit surprised if James didn’t get exactly what he wanted.

Second Year: Brotherhood

Chapter Notes

CW - Remus has some quite dark, negative thoughts in this chapter

Remus did not have a brother – at least not one that he knew anything about. He supposed that his mother might well have re-married and produced a few nice, non-magic, non-monster children. That didn't really feel like his business; he'd accepted his lot in life long ago.

James too, was an only child, and this went at least some way to explaining why he was so cocksure and demanding. Sirius talked about Potter's parents as though they were perfect saints, but they had clearly spoiled their son rotten. Peter had a sister who was a good deal older than him and had already left Hogwarts. She'd been in Hufflepuff, but Peter didn't talk about her very much. She was studying at a muggle university, which was apparently the height of bad taste.

So perhaps none of them really understood what was happening between the two Black brothers, which might have been why they didn't take it very seriously. It began the morning after the sorting. During breakfast, Regulus had received a gift from his parents; a brand-new eagle owl. This was his reward for getting into the right house – which they found out because Severus gleefully read the letter aloud within earshot of the Gryffindor table. Sirius stared at his porridge, not rising to the bait, but Remus looked over at Regulus and saw that he was blushing hard, trying to snatch the letter away from Snape.

"Didn't your parents confiscate your owl again?" Peter asked, bluntly. Sirius gave a sharp nod,

"Said I can have it back when I remember my duty to the family and started acting like a 'true Black'. I don't care, I don't need an owl."

"What exactly *is* your family duty, again?" James mused, loudly, so that the cackling Slytherins could hear them, "Go 'round with creeps like Snivellus and Mulciber? Marry your cousin?"

Sirius' finally looked up at James, his expression half grateful, half mischievous,

"Oh yeah," he replied, conversationally, just as loud as James. Snape, Regulus and most of the other Slytherins who had been laughing were now quiet, narrowing their eyes at the two Gryffindor boys. Peter edged away, slightly. "Inbreeding and creeping are key aspects of my noble heritage. And picking on kids smaller than me, of course; cheating, lying and cursing my way into power..."

"Well, mate, I'm sorry to break it to you," James replied jovially, "But it doesn't sound like you're a Black at all."

"Goodness," Sirius' hand flew to his face in mock surprise, "What on earth *am* I?"

"It's obvious," James shrugged, "You're a Marauder."

Sirius laughed, as did most of the Gryffindors sitting nearby.

Remus saw Severus' hand reach for his wand, and quickly grabbed his own in preparation, running

through a list of spells in his head, trying to come up with one that would stop him quickest. But Regulus nudged Snape with his elbow, muttering; *It's fine*. Remus was sure he was the only Gryffindor who heard it.

"Come on," Snape sneered, "We'd better get away from all this filth if we want to keep our breakfast down."

This only made Sirius and James laugh harder, and Snape swept from the room, followed by Mulciber and a new first year called Barty Crouch. Regulus held back, glancing nervously between his new friends and his brother. The new owl sat perched on his crooked elbow, surveying the scene with an imperious, condescending look. He edged towards Sirius.

"You can borrow it, if you want." Regulus said, quietly, "I never asked her to send me anything, but you know what she's like."

"Yeah," snorted Sirius, "I know."

They both looked at each other for a while, and Remus couldn't tell if they were staring each other down, or trying to find the words to say something very difficult.

"Look, I'm sorry, ok – you knew I'd end up in Slyth—" Regulus started, but was quickly interrupted by Sirius getting quickly to his feet.

"I don't want your owl." He said, stiffly, looking right through his brother, "If I need to send a letter, I'll borrow James'."

With that, he pushed past Regulus and made to leave. James, Remus and Peter hurriedly got up and followed him. Remus glanced back at Regulus, who looked very pale and very cold.

Remus didn't think about Regulus very much after that – the line in the sand had been drawn, and it was their duty as marauders to support Sirius. Besides, they were all much too busy once lessons began.

Remus threw himself into his studies this time, in a complete reversal of his behaviour the previous September. He read along eagerly, answered questions in class and completed his homework as soon as it was set. In everything except potions, he was a model student. He had never forgotten what he had read the year before, about people with his problem. They did not do well, once they'd left school. Those stupid enough to sign the register were excluded from almost any skilled wizarding work. He would have to be the best of the best, and even that might not be enough, but he had six more years to try.

There was another element to his academic aspirations – Sirius. Well, Sirius and James, really, but most importantly Sirius. Remus didn't doubt that Sirius was his friend, exactly – but he did doubt that Sirius truly saw him as an equal. He railed against the Black family's beliefs in blood purity, but at the same time often made snide remarks about Peter's squib heritage. This was always behind Peter's back, and Remus dreaded to think what Sirius was saying about *him*.

Remus had learnt during his very first term at Hogwarts that being a 'half-blood' meant that he was slightly less trusted than other wizards. The Slytherins, in particular, targeted students with any kind of muggle heritage – Marlene McKinnon, whose father was a muggle, had perfected the bat bogey hex before anyone else in their year group, as a means of defence. Lily Evans was protected from torment whenever Snape was nearby, but it was clear that plenty of the students thought that she was rather full of herself, considering the circumstances of her birth.

Sirius never voiced anything quite so strong, but Remus had a feeling that his being better than everyone else at schoolwork was taken as proof that his magic was somehow better. Remus had an extremely strong desire to prove him wrong. It came as a mild surprise; he'd never been very competitive before – but then he'd never been given the tools to compete.

Of course, there would always be one insurmountable obstacle for Remus, and in September of 1972 it came towards the end of the month. Remus had been dreading it as always, and in the days beforehand remembered to mention that he wasn't feeling well in order to prepare his roommates for his impending absence. Truthfully, he had never felt better. Though the transformations had worsened, and the days required to recover had lengthened, Remus also found that as the moon began waxing and gathering strength, so did he.

He was ravenously hungry, his senses sharper, his magic grew thick and heavy on his tongue like syrup and he barely slept at all, instead staying up half the night reading voraciously, trying to ignore Sirius and James' furtive whispering in the next bed.

He arrived at the hospital wing promptly, and Madam Pomfrey and McGonagall once more escorted him down to the whomping willow. They were very quiet as they made their way across the grounds, but once Remus was locked into the shack for the night, he heard the two women stop and begin talking as they travelled back down the long passageway. They mustn't have realised he could hear them – that his hearing was better than most people's, especially on a full moon night.

Madam Pomfrey was complaining about Remus' treatment plan over the summer.

"Covered in injuries! I cannot, in all good conscience allow him to return there, Minerva! It goes against everything I know as a Healer."

"I understand, Poppy," McGonagall responded sharply as they crossed the ground, "It is a difficult matter – when Remus' mother handed him over to the muggle authorities she made things very hard... we have to tread carefully, very carefully. I shall speak to Dumbledore."

"He's such a quiet little thing, never complains, even when he must be in such a lot of pain..."

Remus didn't hear any more, they had travelled too far down the passage and his own screams drowned them out.

* * *

In the morning, Remus came back into his body gasping as if he'd just been born. There was not an inch of him that didn't hurt – his head throbbed sickly, needles pressed behind his eyes; his neck and shoulders felt like snapped elastic; it hurt to breathe. Every heave of his chest caused pain to shoot through him and he was sweating heavily even though the air was cool.

There was a deep gash across his belly that made him want to be sick. He had lost a lot of blood already, and it was still bubbling up, thick wine red. He half crawled, half dragged himself across the room to a box of emergency medical supplies kept under the floorboards. He pulled out some gauze, using all of his remaining energy, and pressed as hard as he could against the dark wound. He cried out from the pain, but kept pressing. His breathing grew shallow, though even that hurt. He felt dizzy, wanted to curl up and sleep. *Stay awake*, he urged himself, furiously, *stay awake or you'll die, you idiot*.

Die, then. A tiny voice appeared in the back of his head, out of nowhere. *It would certainly make things easier. For you. For everyone.* Remus shook his head, dazed. The voice was very kind and soft – like a mother.

He pressed harder, grunting with effort. In his misery, he wondered if the voice was right. Was he clinging onto a life that had never really wanted him; that might never be all that much worth living? What if he did die? What if he just closed his eyes? It might just be a matter of sooner, rather than later.

He closed his eyes, exhaling softly.

“Remus?” Madam Pomfrey’s polite knock arrived on time as always. He ignored it; he was too tired now. He rested his head on the dark floorboards and let go of the gauze. So tired. “Remus!” The door burst open and suddenly she was there, kneeling beside him, pulling his head into her lap.

“G’away,” he murmured, not opening his eyes, “Let me go.”

“Not on your nelly, young man.” Madam Pomfrey said – so fiercely that despite his confused state, Remus laughed. Then he winced, instinctively clutching his chest. The medi-witch aimed her wand at his open wound and stitched it together in a matter of seconds, then she felt his chest, where he’d touched it. “Broken rib,” she murmured, “Poor lamb,” she flicked her wand once more and Remus felt an odd ‘pop’ in his torso – suddenly it didn’t hurt to breathe anymore.

He opened his eyes and looked up at her. She was busy tugging a blanket over his shoulders to keep him warm. “Now then,” she whispered gently, though they were quite alone, “What do you think you’re doing, giving me a scare like that, hm?” Her voice was so warm, and her fingers so tender. Very carefully, she pulled him into a hug, “We can’t lose you, Remus, not while I’m still at Hogwarts.”

“Hurts,” Remus whispered.

She held him tighter and that did it. For the first time in a very long time, Remus began to cry. Not just a few sniffles, either; as the sweet, kind nurse held him he wrapped his own arms around her soft body and bawled like a baby.

* * *

He had to spend two full days in the hospital wing. The wound on his stomach was not the only one he had inflicted that night, though it was the worst. Madam Pomfrey’s spell had been enough to stop the bleeding long enough to get him out of the shack, but he needed rest and quiet. She gave him sleeping draughts regularly, and he drank them down without complaint, preferring not to be awake. The marauders came by trying to see him, but at Remus’ request Madam Pomfrey turned them away.

It was already late on Friday morning when she finally let him go.

“I’ll send a note to your professors, let them know not to expect you. You’re to go straight to your dormitory and lie down, understood?”

He walked up slowly, taking a different route than usual, thinking about the map – he ought to start work on that again, he’d read something very exciting about something called a *homunculus* charm. Once he reached the dorm, Remus crawled onto his bed, drew the curtains around it and lay on his back. Beams of light slid through the joins in the fabric highlighting a galaxy of dust motes.

It was still warm for September, and someone had left the windows thrown open, filling the room with cool air. The breeze sucked the drapes on Remus’ bed in, then pushed them billowing out. He watched it dreamily for a while – in and out, it was like being inside a lung.

“Lupin!” A sharp voice shattered his calm. Sirius ripped back the curtains, flooding the small

space with light, searing Remus' retinas.

"Ugh, what?" He groaned, shielding his eyes.

"Sorry," Sirius rubbed his arm nervously.

"What is it?"

"Remus, I have to tell you something."

They were quiet for a few long moments. Remus slouched back, too tired to sit up. He sighed,

"Well?"

"It's James!" Sirius said, desperately, "He... he wants to talk to you."

"... What?"

"It's... blimey, this is hard to say, Lupin..."

"What are you on about?"

"He knows! James knows! And he wants us to confront you."

Remus sat up, abruptly, his stomach flipping over.

"He... he what? Knows what?"

"About your... you know. Where you go. Every full moon."

Remus stared at Sirius. He didn't know what to do.

"...*You* knew."

"I knew." Sirius confirmed.

"How long?"

"Since last Christmas. I... I didn't want to say anything. Didn't want to make it harder for you."

Remus was speechless. Sirius shook his head, impatient, "But James worked it out too, the lanky idiot, and now he's decided we all need to confront you about it. I'm really sorry, I tried to get him off it, but you know how pig headed he is."

"Yeah." Remus croaked, leaning forward rather suddenly. He held his head in his hands. This was it. He was about to lose everything; everything that meant anything to him.

"It's ok... I think it's going to be ok." Sirius said.

"How?" Remus lifted his head, hot with terror. "Might as well start packing now."

"No! Don't. Look, he wants to talk to you about it, he's not going straight to Dumbledore or anything, doesn't that mean something?"

But Remus had already got up, opened his trunk and begun emptying things into it. He might have to leave straight away; they might not even give him time to pack. Would they let him keep his wand? He'd grown very fond of it, and it had belonged to his father, so it was rightfully his.

Perhaps if he promised only to ever do the reading spell with it?

“Remus!” Sirius grabbed his shoulders. He flinched, but only because he expected it to hurt. Sirius’ dark blue eyes bored into him, and he tried to look away. “Listen to me,” Black said, very gently, “Just wait, ok? Just wait and see what James says – he’s your friend. We’re marauders, all of us!”

“That’s bollocks,” Remus shoved him away, “That’s complete bollocks. *You two* are the marauders, you and him. Me and Peter are just your pet charity cases.” He seized his pyjamas from the end of the bed and flung them into his trunk. “I’m not that much of an idiot, Black. I’m probably better off going back where I belong.”

It was the first time Sirius had ever been speechless. But then, it was the first time Remus had ever said so much to him. His mouth twitched once or twice, as though he wanted to speak, but couldn’t quite manage it. Remus kept packing.

“Just wait,” Sirius said, hoarsely, leaving the room, “Just wait and see what he says.”

Second Year: Potions, again

Despite all of his talk, Remus did wait. He couldn't see that he had many options, other than to go directly to Dumbledore and ask to be sent back to St Edmund's – and he wasn't exactly sure where Dumbledore's office was. He hadn't got that far with the map. The map – he'd better leave that behind. Sirius and James could finish it.

At least he wasn't tired anymore. He sat on his trunk fidgeting for what felt like hours. Thought about going down for lunch – but what if they wanted to talk to him right there in front of everyone? He stayed put. He wasn't hungry anyway. He tried to read, but couldn't concentrate for long enough.

Every so often Remus' mind wandered back to his conversation – argument – with Sirius. He wasn't sure how he felt about it. On the one hand, once the initial terror had passed, he could see that Sirius was trying to be kind. If he really had known since last Christmas, then he probably had no intention of telling anyone else. And he'd given Remus fair warning, at least. But on the other hand, what Remus had said was true. Just because James was Sirius' best friend didn't mean that he would have any protective feelings towards Remus. They were friends, certainly, but only because they were dorm mates. Remus couldn't play quidditch, wasn't from a good family, had no money. On top of all of that, would Potter's perfect reputation allow him associate himself with a dark creature?

As for Sirius – Sirius couldn't even forgive his own brother for being in a different school house. If family didn't matter to him, then why would friendship?

Just after the four o'clock bell rang Remus heard three sets of footsteps tramping up the stairs. He stood up, bracing himself. James entered first, looking very serious and somehow older than all of them. Sirius came in behind him, his expression inscrutable, no trace of the emotion from earlier. Peter was last, looking – as usual – very uncomfortable and out of his depth.

"Hiya Remus," James said, straight away. They all stood facing each other, the room feeling very small, even with the window open.

"Hi." Remus replied, trying to keep his eyes on all three of them at once.

"How are you feeling?"

"Fine."

"Look mate, I'll get right to it, ok?" James ran his fingers through his hair, swallowing nervously – Remus could see his Adam's apple working, "We've noticed... well we couldn't *not* notice that you're away a lot, in the hospital wing. Every month, pretty much,"

Peter was nodding sycophantically behind him and Remus felt a surge of hatred rise up out of nowhere. He repressed it, focussing instead on meeting James' eyes. They already thought he was a wild animal. Best not to confirm it.

"Ok." He said, sullenly.

"Yeah," James nodded, as if they were having a perfectly normal conversation. "Every month... around the full moon."

He let it hang in the air. Remus grew impatient to get it over with,

“Just say it, James.”

“Are-you-a-werewolf?” It came out all in a rush, and James’ gaze finally dropped, as though he was embarrassed to have asked.

Remus glanced at Sirius, who was still staring at him with a look of determination. Peter was gnawing his bottom lip, his eyes darting between Remus and James. Remus squared his shoulders.

“Yeah.” He jutted his chin forward, as if daring James to strike him. Whatever; he was ready for it.

James exhaled,

“Right.”

“That it?”

“Yes—I mean no—I mean... bloody hell...” James ran his hands through his hair again, turning to the others for support, looking helpless.

“It’s ok.” Remus said, his voice hard, “I’m off. Just let me go and tell McGonagall.”

“Off? Off where?!”

“Back to St. Edmund’s, I s’pose.” As if there was anywhere else!

“You can’t leave Hogwarts!” James looked even more worried now, his glasses had slid down his nose and he hadn’t even noticed.

“I can’t stay if everyone knows.” Remus explained, as calmly as he could.

“We won’t tell anyone!” Peter squeaked suddenly. Remus looked at him in surprise, then at Sirius, then at James. James was nodding now.

“We won’t.” He confirmed.

Remus shook his head, not allowing himself to entertain the idea – to even hope. Hope never got you anywhere; if he knew anything, he knew that. It was a rule written on his skin in thick silver lines.

“This isn’t a game. ‘Keep the secret’, or whatever. If other people find out, I *will* have to leave. It could be worse than that, they might...” He didn’t say it. What was the use in saying it?

“We won’t let it happen.” Sirius finally spoke, stepping tentatively forward. “Will we?” He turned to Peter and James, either side of him. They both looked very serious and very frightened, but they both shook their heads firmly.

“Trust us.” James said. “Please?”

* * *

He agreed to give them a month. Or they agreed to give him a month – he wasn’t sure. It wasn’t clear who thought who was more dangerous. It was agony, at first, every moment filled with awkwardness and a new kind of shyness that hadn’t been there before. *They think I’m a monster*, a voice in Remus’ head chanted, over and over, *they think I’m going to murder them in their beds, they think I’m evil*.

And really, when he thought about it, nothing yet had proved that he wasn't. It had been clear for some time that his affliction was subject to change as he grew into adolescence. Remus had no idea how far it would go. Perhaps one day he would cross that line; perhaps that was simply the way of things.

For a whole week, they didn't talk about it. Not a word, not even a whisper. Remus had felt sure they would all badger him with questions; Sirius especially, but he had evidently been so severe with them when the confrontation happened that no one wanted to bring it up again. In front of everyone else they acted the same – James was loud and over-confident, Sirius was witty and arrogant, Peter adoring and insecure. But when they were alone together the four of them were quiet, thoughtful and too polite. Sirius' and James' nightly conferences became even more frequent.

Unexpectedly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, it was Severus Snape who ended up reuniting the marauders.

It was, of course, during a Potions class. This term, they were embarking upon 'pleasant dream' potions, which would take some weeks to brew.

"You'll need to come back regularly in the evenings to check on your potion's progress – I shall be marking you on persistence and attentiveness. To that end, I think it's best if you all pair up so that you can take it in turns." Slughorn announced.

There was a general flurry and chatter as students began to pick their partners. Remus resigned himself to sharing with Peter, as usual. But above the commotion, Slughorn raised his voice again,

"No no, I've learnt my lesson," He gave the marauders a severe look, "You may not choose the same partners you had last year."

Sirius and James looked at each other, then at Peter and Remus, sizing them up. Remus cringed.

"In fact," Slughorn continued, "I think *I* shall assign the partners..."

Fortunately Slughorn was tactful enough not to put any of them with Snape, though Peter ended up with Mulciber, who towered over him, twice his size. The professor split up Mary and Marlene, who were as joined at the hip as James and Sirius, placing them with the boys.

"I want Sirius!" Mary squealed. Marlene nudged her and they dissolved into giggles. Sirius looked horrified, James looked put out – he ran his hands through his hair and straightened his back slightly.

Remus was asked to pair up with Lily Evans, much to his disgust. He didn't really like any of the girls, but he wanted to work with Lily least of all. She was nosey and tried too hard to be nice. Plus she was best friends with Snape, who was now staring daggers at him from across the room.

Remus could not forget the incident during in first year, in which Lily had stopped Snape and Mulciber from attacking him – and her general disdain for his friends. In fact, every encounter he had so far had with Lily turned out relatively unpleasant for Remus.

She seemed to recognise his dislike, and smiled at him nervously,

"Hi Remus, are you feeling better?" She squeaked. He grunted in response, head down.

"Better keep well back, Lily," Snape hissed from the desk he was sharing with a Slytherin girl, "*Loony Lupin* might be contagious."

“Shut it, Snivellus,” Remus muttered in response, trying not to let Slughorn hear.

“Yes, please be quiet, Sev,” Lily said, primly, giving him a hard look.

“Only trying to *help*,” the greasy haired boy replied, lips curling, “We don’t want anyone else coming down with Lupin’s mysterious ailment, do we? Let me know if you need anything, Lily.”

“Remus and I are quite capable of completing the assignment ourselves, thank you.” She snapped, tossing her mane of red curls and opening her textbook with an elaborate flourish. She looked at Remus, “We need eight rats tails, finely diced. Do you want to do that, or shall I?”

“Erm. I’ll do it,” Remus replied, taken aback.

“Good. I’ll start weighing the rosemary leaves, then.”

They worked quietly for a while, and it might have been all right if they were at another desk, but Snape was close behind them the whole time, casting spiteful glances at Remus and speaking just above a murmur,

“Of course, ‘Loony Lupin’ is quite apt,” he said to the girl he was working with, “Because he really is utterly mad – I’ve seen him, wandering around the castle on his own, lurking in dark corners. You may recall he actually *attacked* me last year. He’s clearly dangerous, I don’t know why Dumbledore allows it.”

Remus felt his ears turning red. He turned around, holding out his wand,

“Say one more word.” He growled. Snape looked him up and down, smirking. Lily grabbed Remus’ arm and pulled him back,

“Just ignore him,” she whispered, though she sounded very annoyed herself, “He’s having a bad time at home and blames it on everyone else, that’s all.”

“Fine.” Remus said, returning to his rat’s tails. The blood stained his fingers.

Once they had prepared their ingredients, it came time to stir. Remus was starting to get along quite well with Lily now. She was patient and didn’t act like she knew everything, like James and Sirius. She was a bit of a goody-two-shoes, but he remembered that he was trying to be one too, so he’d better learn to like it.

“I’ll stir,” he said, heroically – he’d never offered to do something for a girl before; hadn’t so much as held a door open, his contact with the fairer sex had been so limited. It felt very grown up and James-like. He rolled up his sleeves and grabbed the large wooden spoon.

“Eurgh! *Look at him!*” Snape’s nasty, cloying voice rang out loud enough for half the class to hear now. Remus looked up and found that everyone was looking at him. At his bare arms. He hurriedly yanked his robes down to cover the marks, but they’d all seen. “What sort of disease does *that*?!”

“Shut *up*, Severus!” Lily barked, “Why do you have to be so horrid?!”

“Lily, just *look!*”

“Mind your own business!”

Remus’ mind was racing. He wished the ground would swallow him up. He wished he could crawl

under the desk. He wished he knew how to apparate. He'd give anything to throw another punch at Snape. The marauders had heard too, Sirius and James raised their heads from their cauldrons,

"Oi, Snivellus, what are you saying about our mate?"

"Oh, stay out of this, Potter!" Lily groaned, "You'll only make it worse!"

"Silence, please!" Slughorn boomed, "You're not first years any more, I should think you're able to concentrate on the task at hand."

Everyone fell quiet. Remus was gripping the stirrer with all his might.

"I'm sorry, Remus," Lily whispered, looking genuinely upset, "He's such a... oh, I don't know! Look, I've got these." She held out her hand, covertly. Remus looked down. She held two greyish round things that looked like bullets, or tablets.

"What?" He asked, gormlessly,

"He was annoying me last week, showing off about how good he is at potions... I know it's petty of me, but I wanted to teach him a lesson, so I made these. Then he had this thing with his mum and I felt sorry for him, so I didn't use them. But *now*..."

"Evans," Remus said, exasperated, "What *are* they?!"

"Just something I've been playing around with in Slug club," Lily smiled enigmatically. Remus noticed that she was actually strikingly pretty. "They'll react with his potion. It'll be really good."

He stared at her, awestruck,

"But you're such a..."

"Teachers pet? Swot? Good-goody?" She smiled wider, showing all of her neat white teeth, "*Some* of us know how not to get caught, Mr Marauder."

He shook his head, bemused.

"Here," She shoved the pills into his hand, "You do it. Toss them in when he's not looking. Oi, Potter!" She shouted across the room. James' head snapped up, his glasses foggy from the steam emanating from his cauldron,

"Huh?"

Snape had looked up too, and was glaring at James. Remus moved quickly, pretending to yawn and stretching his arms out, his right hand just reaching over Snape's cauldron. He dropped in the pills, just as Lily said,

"Oh, nothing," very sweetly, before turning back to her work. Both Snape and James stared at her in confusion. Remus was impressed.

His admiration only grew as she grabbed Remus' arm, yanking him back as Snape's cauldron exploded behind them, a magnificent mass of foaming purple bubbles spilling over the brim, all over Severus and his partner's clothes.

The whole class began to laugh, and Snape turned white with rage, his nostrils flaring.

"Oh dear!" Slughorn bustled over, "A bit overeager with the beetle husks, eh Severus?"

“It wasn’t me!” Snape fumed, purple bubbles settling in his hair, “*He* did something!” He pointed at Remus, who winced, “He must have!”

“Did you see Mr Lupin tamper with your poition?”

“No, but...”

“Come now boy,” Slughorn laughed, throwing him a green tea towel, “We all make mistakes – even you!”

Severus spluttered incoherently, and Lily was clearly struggling to keep a straight face, eventually having to turn around, her shoulders shaking in silent hysterics.

After the lesson, the marauders piled on Remus in the hallway, whooping and cheering.

“You did it, didn’t you!”

“Brilliant!”

“How did you do it? You’re crap at potions!”

Remus grinned back at them, neither confirming nor denying. Over James’ shoulder, he saw Lily flash him a quick smile, before hurrying away up the stairs.

“Didn’t I tell you?!” Sirius proclaimed brightly, throwing an arm around James and another around Remus, “He’s *still* a marauder!”

Second Year: After Hours

Friday 6th September 1972

Once the initial ice had been broken, the questions came flooding in. That evening, after dinner, all four boys sat on Remus' bed,

“When did it happen?”

“Does Dumbledore know?!”

“Have you ever, y’know, *attacked* anyone?”

“What’s it *like*?”

“Where do you go, when it happens?!”

Remus gnawed his bottom lip. He’d never talked about his condition before, not to anyone – except for his conversation with Madam Pomfrey last year. None of the muggles he’d grown up with would have believed him, and he’d been led to believe that wizards would shun him.

“Er...” he tried to work out where to start, “I was five years old, when it happened. I don’t really remember much before that. Yeah, Dumbledore knows. I don’t *think* I’ve ever hurt anyone. I think I’d probably know, if I did.”

“So when you turn, you can remember what it’s like?” Sirius asked, eagerly, “Being a wolf?”

“Um... not really?” Remus thought hard, “Maybe I can remember feeling stuff, but I don’t think I have a human brain while I’m like that. It’s more like a really bad dream.”

“I always thought werewolves were more...” Peter looked at him thoughtfully, “I dunno, scary?”

Remus shrugged.

“So is that what happened to your dad?” Sirius asked, abruptly, “Did he get killed by the werewolf that bit you?”

Remus flinched. Not because of his father, but because he wasn’t used to hearing that ‘w’ word quite so much. He never said it, himself.

“No,” he replied, “My dad, he... uh... well, he killed himself. After I was bitten, so I s’pose it was because of me. My mother – you know, she’s a muggle, I think it was probably a bit much for her, so she packed me off to St Edmund’s.”

There was an uncomfortable sort of silence.

“Have you ever met—” Sirius began, but James gave him a sharp look,

“That’s enough, Black, leave him alone.”

They eventually split off to start their homework, and James went for a run around the grounds before it got dark. Quidditch trials were coming up and he was becoming more obsessed with fitness and endurance by the day. He tried to get Peter and Sirius to go with him, but they begged off.

“Bloody slave driver,” Peter muttered, as he left. “I’ve told him I’m not even trying out.”

“I think I probably will,” Sirius said, casually, “They need a beater, anyway.”

Homework was eventually cast aside in favour of a particularly aggressive game of exploding snap between the three of them, with a record spinning on its needle – The Beatles, because Peter pleaded for a break from Bowie.

Later, after lights out, Remus sat up reading a book Sirius had lent him. It was a muggle paperback – science fiction. He’d seen a few films like it at the local cinema back at St Edmund’s, but he didn’t know there were books too. It was just getting exciting when he heard the tell-tale creak of the floorboards that meant Sirius was paying James a visit. He heard the curtains rustle, and low whispering, before a sudden unnatural void of sound which meant someone had cast a silencing spell.

Remus ignored it, scrunching down into his duvet and focussing on his book. It was perhaps twenty minutes later that he heard the silencing spell being recalled – it was as though he had been deaf in one ear and could suddenly hear again. He listened to the curtain rustle again, as Sirius climbed back and padded softly back across the room.

This time, however, his footsteps came closer, and much to Remus’ surprise, his own bed curtains cracked open. Sirius long, pale face peered in on him,

“Hiya,” he whispered,

“Hi...” Remus replied, “What’s up?”

“Saw your wandlight,” he nodded, “Can I come in?”

“Erm... ok?”

Sirius grinned and slipped inside easily, kneeling on the bed in front of Remus, who drew his legs up to his chest, setting his book aside.

“*Sonoro Quiescis*,” Sirius whispered, casting the sound proofing charm so that they would not disturb the others. “How’s the book?” He looked at the paperback resting on the pillow next to Remus.

“Good,” Remus replied, noncommittally. “What’s up?” He repeated.

“I was just talking to James.” He said, settling down, sitting cross-legged, “He reckons I’ve upset you, asking questions about your dad.”

“Oh,” Remus cocked his head, surprised, “No, I’m ok. It doesn’t upset me; I’m used to it.”

“That’s what I told James.”

“Right.”

Sirius didn’t leave, he just kept looking at Remus. It was making him uncomfortable, he was only wearing a thin vest to sleep in, which displayed a number of red and silver marks criss-crossing his bare arms and shoulders. Sirius stared, openly.

“How did you get your scars?” He asked, quietly. Remus frowned, pulling the bedsheets up to his neck,

“How did you get yours?!” He snapped. He instantly regretted it; Sirius stopped gazing at his skin and recoiled, eyes full of hurt and surprise.

“I... from my parents. The *Lacero* curse, it’s how they discipline us.” He said, his voice a little robotic.

“Sorry,” Remus dropped the duvet. He sighed, extending his arms so that Sirius could see better, “I do them to myself, when I’m... when I change, see?” He pulled down one shoulder of his vest and twisted slightly to show him four long white claw marks.

“Wow,” Sirius breathed, on his knees again, leaning forward with his lit wand to get a better look. “Why do you do it?”

“I don’t know, I’m not exactly myself. Madam Pomfrey reckons it’s frustration – because it’s in my nature to attack people and I don’t have anyone to attack.”

“Where do they put you?”

“There’s this old house... McGonagall and Pomfrey take me there every month, there’s a passageway under the Whomping Willow.”

“Does McGonagall *watch* you?!”

“No! It’s too dangerous. I think they use spells to keep me locked in.”

“Sounds horrible.”

Remus shrugged,

“Nah, it’s not as bad as back at St Eddy’s, they have a cell for me there, with a silver door. When I first got there – Matron thinks I was too little to remember, but they put me in a cage.”

Sirius looked up at him sharply,

“That’s disgusting!”

“I dunno,” Remus was surprised by his reaction, “It was to keep everyone else safe. And I can only have been the size of a puppy.”

“Cub.” Sirius said, promptly.

“Huh?”

“A baby wolf is a cub. Dogs are puppies.”

“Oh.”

“So where did you get bitten?” Sirius had swapped concern for curiosity once more.

“Oh, um, here.” Remus patted his left side, just above his hip. Sirius looked at him expectantly. Remus sighed again, “Do you want to see?”

Sirius nodded, eagerly, leaning forward again as Remus lifted his shirt at the hem. He barely noticed the bite-mark any more, though it stood out as much as it ever had. It was a huge scar, evidence of an unbelievably large jaw. You could count every tooth, if you were so inclined; the deep dimples marring Remus’ soft skin. Sirius got very close now, so that Remus had to lean all

the way back to stop their heads from bumping.

“Oh wow...” he breathed, lost in his observation like someone who’d unearthed a great archaeological treasure.

Remus felt Sirius’ long hair brush his skin, and the warmth of his breath, and pushed him away quickly,

“God, Black, you’re so weird.”

Sirius just grinned that Sirius Black grin.

* * *

Friday 13th October 1972

“So what exactly are we doing here?” James whispered, sounding amused.

“And why did we have to bring the stupid cloak?” Sirius said, slightly muffled under the fabric, “It’s hours until curfew.”

“I’m hot,” Peter complained.

“Shut up, all of you.” Remus commanded, “I’m trying to concentrate.”

“Concentrate on wha—ouch!”

Remus kicked Sirius in the shin.

“I said shut up.”

“Bloody oik,” Sirius muttered – but he was quiet after that.

Remus sniffed. It definitely smelled like chocolate. The whole corridor – only a faint whiff, as you turned the corner, but richer and sweeter the further you walked towards a statue near the middle. The scent had been driving Remus mad for weeks – since he noticed it late last term. It had to have something to do with the statue – a witch with a hunched back and an eye patch. It was a horrible portrait, he hoped that the artist had just been particularly unkind, and the poor woman hadn’t really *looked* like that.

“Have you brought us here to meet your new girlfriend, Lupin?” James asked, smirking as Remus continued to stare at the one-eyed witch.

“Why’d you keep sniffing like that?” Sirius whined, “I don’t want to be this close to you if you’re getting a cold.”

“Can’t any of you smell that?”

“Smell what?”

“...chocolate. Definitely chocolate.”

“Chocolate? Where?” Peter suddenly perked up.

“I can’t smell anything.” Sirius said.

“Me neither,” said James.

“It’s coming from the statue,” Remus continued, unperturbed by his friend’s teasing. He reached out and touched the stone carefully through the cloak.

“What? Reckon the old bint’s hump is packed with sweets or something?” Sirius was starting to sound bored and irritable. It bothered Remus a little bit, sometimes. He and Peter got dragged along on all sorts of stupid ‘missions’ by the other two, but if he and James weren’t in charge then Sirius always acted up.

“No.” Remus said, “I reckon it’s one of those secret passages from that book of yours.”

“Really?!” Now Sirius was paying attention. “Can you actually smell chocolate? Is that some... special thing you can do?”

“Yeah.”

“It doesn’t lead to the kitchens,” Peter said, knowledgeably, “They’re on the ground floor, a Hufflepuff told me.”

“How can we get in?”

“Password?” James suggested, “Like the common room.”

“Scallywag!” Peter shouted at the witch, eagerly. Nothing happened.

“I didn’t mean it would be the exact same password, Peter.” James said. He was being kind, but Sirius and Remus were already in fits of laughter.

“What about *Alohomora*?” Sirius suggested, recovering. Remus tried it, but nothing happened.

“That’s for locks, anyway,” James said, “Isn’t it something else for revealing unseen entryways?”

“Oh yeah!” Sirius nodded, getting excited, “Yeah there is... umm... *Dissendium*!” He tapped his wand on the witch’s hump.

Immediately, the hump opened, sliding away leaving a gap easily big enough for them to file inside, one at a time. The smell of chocolate grew even stronger, and now Remus could also smell earth, fresh air and other people.

They lost no time slipping inside, and the hump closed behind them.

“Lumos!” they all said in unison, throwing off the cloak. James folded it up under his arm and immediately assumed leadership.

“C’mon then,” he said, holding his wand ahead of them, lighting up the dark passage, “Let’s go!”

They all followed. Remus didn’t mind – he’d done his bit.

It was a long walk, down a flight of cold stone stairs, through a tunnel that was earthy and damp. But the scent grew stronger, and when they finally reached the end, there was another staircase, leading to a wooden trap door. They looked at each other and silently agreed that James should go first. They watched him ascend, push open the door, and poke his head through. Remus felt that they were all holding their breath, watching James’ torso disappear up into the unknown.

“I don’t believe it!” He laughed above them, “You have to see!” He hauled himself upwards,

vanishing altogether. Sirius scurried up after him, not wanting to miss anything. Remus went next, but Peter dithered behind them.

“Where are we?” Sirius was asking, staring around at the dark little room. They were surrounded by neatly stacked boxes and crates. The smell of confectionary by now was overwhelming.

“I think we’re actually in Hogsmeade!” James said, excitedly, “This is the storeroom at Honeydukes!”

“The sweetshop?” Remus asked, thought it was pretty redundant at this point. Sirius had ripped open a box which looked to contain at least five hundred boxes of chocolate frogs.

Remus had heard all about Hogsmeade from the other boys – they’d all visited on family holidays before; it was one of the only entirely magical villages in Britain. Older students were allowed to go on their weekends, and often brought back paper bags bulging with sweets from Honeydukes. Standing in the cellar at that moment Remus could not have been happier with the outcome of this mission.

They finally coaxed Peter up, and spent a good hour exploring the shop, marvelling at their own brilliance. They chose a little bit of everything, with Remus directing them, as the only one with any kind of shoplifting experience. James thought Remus didn’t see him slip a bag of sickles and galleons from his robes and leave them on the counter as they were leaving.

The marauders returned to the Gryffindor common room with their pockets heavy and huge grins on their faces. A prefect took points from all of them for missing curfew, but they couldn’t care less. When they all lay in bed hours later, pretending not to have stomach aches, Sirius called out,

“That’s definitely going on the map.”

Second Year: Quidditch

Chapter Summary

In which Remus has to do a lot of emotional labour.

“I’ve had enough.” Peter said, grimly. Remus sighed, next to him. He knew the feeling, but there wasn’t much point whinging about it now. “I really have!” Peter reiterated, his voice slightly high as he looked up at Remus for validation.

“I know you have.” Remus replied, hoping to placate him.

“They’ve dragged us into all sorts of stuff, got us detentions - and I never complained.”

“Well. You did a bit.” Remus raised an eyebrow. Peter nodded,

“Ok, I did *sometimes*, but I always did as James said. And Sirius, even though he’s horrible to me.”

“Sirius is horrible to everyone.” Remus said, getting bored now.

“Well this time I’ve definitely had enough.” Peter continued. “They’ve gone too far.”

“We’re just being supportive,” Remus yawned, leaning forward on the wooden spectator stands, “Thought you liked being supportive.”

“Not-” Peter grimaced, “At five o’clock in the morning.”

Remus was inclined to agree, even if he wasn’t going to whinge about it. At least Peter actually *liked* quidditch. They looked out on the quiet pitch, grass thick and green under a gauzy veil of early morning mist. James and Sirius were presumably still in the changing rooms with the rest of the Gryffindor quidditch team hopefuls. Remus and Peter were both huddled in the stands, wrapped in their scarves and hats, waiting for the trials to begin.

They had been there for at least an hour already – too early even for breakfast, because James had wanted to practice beforehand. They might have said no, and slept in instead, letting the other two go early if they wanted. But Peter was right; they always did as James said, he was just too good at convincing them. Remus yawned again.

“Oh, hello, Remus,” Lily Evans came up the stairs, smiling at them tiredly, “Hi Peter.”

“Morning.” Remus nodded back,

“Lo, Lily,” Peter yawned.

“Chilly, isn’t it! Here to watch the quidditch trials?”

“Yup.”

“Should have known James would be having a go.” Lily said, wearily. James’ quidditch fanaticism was not restricted to the marauders dorm room; everyone who’d ever met him knew how keen he

was.

“Sirius, too.” Remus said.

“Well, never one without the other.” Lily replied primly.

“Who are you watching?” Peter asked.

“Marlene,” Lily pointed at the far end of the pitch, where the Gryffindor quidditch team and new applicants were gathering by the goal posts. Remus could just make out Marlene McKinnon’s pale blonde ponytail. “She’s going for beater.”

“That’s the position Siri-“ Peter started, but Remus kicked him quickly in the leg.

Lily looked at them, bemused, and opted to change the subject.

“Remus, can you check on the ‘pleasant dream’ potion tonight? I’m really behind on my astrology and I wanted to talk to Professor Aster.”

“Can’t,” Remus replied, leaning forward on his elbows, “We’ve got detention.”

“Oh. What for?”

“Levitating all of the tables and chairs in the Defence Against the Darks Arts classroom.” Peter supplied.

“Really?” Lily looked surprised, “I didn’t hear about that.”

“We haven’t done it yet,” Remus said, “We’re going to later while everyone’s at lunch. But I expect they’ll know it was us and we’ll get the detention anyway.”

Lily tutted,

“What did I say about getting caught, Lupin?” She grinned impishly.

Remus shrugged, giving her a small smile back. Lily really wasn’t that bad. She had that gift all girls had for making you look stupid, but at least she had a sense of humour about it. It was particularly pleasant to see her without Snape, who usually loomed nearby like a vampire bat, reeking of gloom and disapproval.

There was finally movement on the quidditch pitch as all of the hopefuls were put through their paces. James could not fail to impress; he was on top form that day. He swooped and dived and twisted in mid-air as if it were nothing – as if he were swimming, not flying. Remus heard Lily’s sharp intake of breath as James attempted a particularly tight turn.

“Does he have to show off like that?” She said, nervously, “He’ll get himself killed.”

“He won’t,” Peter said, “I’ve known him since we were five years old and he’s never even fallen off his broom. Not once.”

“No wonder he thinks he’s untouchable.” Lily muttered.

The rest of the would-be chasers took their turns, but it was obvious that James was the best choice. Next it was the beaters – Sirius, Marlene and a burly fifth year were banded their bats and took to the sky along with six bludgers. It was horrible to watch; Remus’ nerves were set on edge as the brutal red cannonballs shot towards his friend’s head and body. Sirius deftly avoided the

bludgers and knocked a few out of the way, but Marlene was unstoppable. She flew circles around her competition, swinging her bat with machine precision and sending the bludgers flying across the pitch every time.

“Bloody hell.” Peter exclaimed, “Didn’t know McKinnon had it in her.”

“Her brother plays for the Cannons,” Lily explained, looking smug on Marlene’s behalf. “She’s been training with him all summer.”

“Sirius has been too,” Peter said, defending his friend, all previous slights forgotten, “He and James were at it constantly, weren’t they, Remus?”

Remus didn’t reply, even to remind Peter that he had not spent the summer with them. He was too busy being embarrassed for Sirius, and wishing Marlene McKinnon didn’t have to be so bloody good at whacking bludgers—or at least wishing that there were two positions open for beater. He wasn’t sure why he cared so much – he hated quidditch, and if Sirius and James were both on the team then it meant he’d have to spend a lot more time shivering in the stands. And he’d been secretly waiting for Sirius to fail at something for ages, waiting for proof that Sirius Black wasn’t utterly perfect in every way.

But now that the moment was here, Remus felt guilty for thinking it. Sirius was sure to be crestfallen.

“Here they come!” Lily jumped up and ran down the steps to meet her friend. Remus and Peter followed her slowly.

“I got in!” Marlene was grinning, her face pink with pleasure. She and Lily hugged.

James looked incredibly pleased with himself too, his hair sticking up wildly from the wind, his glasses slightly askew. Still, he wasn’t smiling as much as Marlene, obviously trying to subdue himself for Sirius’s sake. Sirius had a face like thunder – Peter actually took a step back just at the sight of him.

“Yeah, well done, McKinnon.” Sirius said, gruffly, looking at the ground.

“Thanks... er... you were really good too, Sirius.” She said, nervously. He grunted, still not looking up.

James looked at him sideways and made an apologetic face at the girls. He extended his hand to Marlene,

“See you next week for the first practice?”

“Yeah, great!” She smiled at him brightly, “See you, Potter!”

The two girls set off back to the castle, arm in arm, chattering away excitedly.

“Sirius, mate, it’s not the end of the world.” James turned to his friend, looking concerned.

“I know.” Sirius kicked a tuft of grass.

“You could have been on the reserve team if you wanted, Singh did offer.”

“I know. I don’t want to be on the bench.”

“Shall we go for breakfast?” James sighed finally, looking at the other two for support. Peter

nodded enthusiastically.

Remus couldn't help but feel a little annoyed. This was all Potter had talked about since they started at Hogwarts, and Sirius didn't even have the decency to be happy for his best friend.

"Well done, James," Remus said, rather pointedly, looking at Sirius as he said it, "You were amazing, congratulations."

"Cheers, Lupin," James grinned. His eyes crinkled slightly when he smiled, and his face lit up – as if that was his face's natural state.

"Yeah," Peter said, punching him on the arm, "Nice one, Potter."

"Thanks!"

They walked back to the castle together quietly. Sirius still wasn't speaking, and he was walking a few steps ahead of the rest of them. James jogged to keep up,

"You can try again next year, Ardal will have left by then, he told me he was dropping out to focus on his NEWTs."

"I don't care, it's fine." Sirius replied, shrugging him off. He walked even faster, quickly getting away from them, broom still under his arm. James went to catch him up, but Remus grabbed his arm,

"Leave him." He said, angrily, "Let him go if he wants to be a moody git about it."

Sirius did not join them for breakfast, nor was he in the common room afterwards. James was waylaid by most of the other Gryffindors, who by now had heard from the team that he was the new chaser. A gang of fourth year boys pulled him over to talk strategy, and Peter went too, basking in his friend's glory. That never mattered with James; he always had plenty of shine to share.

Remus was not a fan of the spotlight, and took the opportunity to look for Sirius. He wasn't in their dorm, but that was expected – clearly Black wanted to mope somewhere in private. But Remus wrote the book on hiding places, and it wasn't long before he found him, curled up in an enclave hidden behind a tapestry depicting a unicorn hunt.

"G'away, Lupin." Sirius scowled, turning away, arms around his knees. His voice was thick, as though he'd been crying, though his face was dry. "You can't cheer me up, ok."

Remus rolled his eyes, clambering into the enclave with him, forcing him to move,

"Budge up," he said, firmly, "I'm not here to cheer you up, you prat."

"What?"

"What you sitting here moping for? Your best mate just had all of his dreams come true at once, go and be a good sport."

Sirius made an indignant noise, still trying to move away from Remus, though there wasn't much space left now.

"You wouldn't understand." He sniffed.

"I s'pose not," Remus confirmed, calmly, "But I do understand that James really, really wanted to

be a chaser, and he worked really hard for it, and he got it. And Marlene really wanted to be a beater, and she worked really hard too – Evans told us. So she got it. She was just better than you.”

“Piss off!” Sirius gave him a shove, but Remus was used to getting pushed around, and whether Sirius liked it or not, Remus was stronger.

“You didn’t even *care* that much!” He continued, pushing back, “Not as much as Potter. You only did the trial because he was doing it, but you don’t *always* have to be the same. You still beat him at Transfiguration. You still get the best marks in the year. Everyone *likes* you. Well, except the Slytherins and um... maybe your family, but who cares. Peter’s family don’t like him either.”

Sirius let out a weak laugh at that, despite himself.

“So stop acting like a little kid and go and say well done.”

“Fine.”

“Good.”

They both hopped down from the ledge, pushing the tapestry out of the way. The tiny embroidered knights shook their fists at the boys for disrupting their pursuit of the silver unicorn, which whinnied and galloped into a dense copse of woven trees.

They walked back to the common room. Sirius shoved his hands in his pockets.

“Did you all have breakfast?” He asked, sulkily.

“Yep.” Remus replied. “James saved you some toast, though.”

“He’s a good mate.” Sirius smiled.

“Yeah,” Remus snapped, “He is.”

They were quiet for a bit longer. Just before they reached the portrait of the fat lady, Sirius looked at Remus. His eyes were still slightly pink, but other than that he seemed himself again.

“I *don’t* try to copy James.”

“Didn’t say you did.” Remus said. “You compete, though.”

Sirius seemed to acknowledge this. He looked up again.

“And I don’t care what my family thinks.” He said this so fiercely that his eyes shone, glistening slightly, and Remus was worried he’d start crying again. He reached out and touched Sirius's shoulder, warily, as you might try to calm a growling dog.

“I know, mate.” He said, softly. “I know that.”

Second Year: A Birthday Engagement

Chapter Summary

Sirius turns thirteen :)

Chapter Notes

CW - homophobic language/attitudes

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Friday 3rd November 1972

Sirius's thirteenth birthday did not fall on the full moon, as his twelfth had. He never told the others about the talking to he'd got from Remus – not as far as Remus could tell, anyway – but he did act slightly differently towards his friends. Whereas before he had sometimes treated Remus as a bit of a pet project; amazed whenever Lupin exhibited independent thought; Sirius at least appeared to develop some sensitivity towards the two secondary marauders.

The subject of quidditch was still a sore one, and so on the morning of his second Hogwarts birthday James had enough tact not to suggest a lunchtime flying session.

Breakfast began with a round of 'happy birthday' at the very tops of their voices, as had become tradition for the marauders by now. The Potters sent Sirius a huge basket of chocolates, while James had ordered half of Zonko's catalogue as a birthday present. Remus was a bit embarrassed to hand over his own gifts – some old copies of *Melody Maker* and *NME* that he'd pinched over the summer – but Sirius was thrilled; one of them had an interview with Marc Bolan. They spent most of breakfast turning the pages; the three pure-blood wizards laughing at the static muggle photographs.

Remus kept sneaking looks at Sirius, wondering if he looked any different now he was a teenager. Remus had wanted to be thirteen for ages; it seemed to him a very mature, grand sort of age. He knew it was silly to think you could become imbued with some kind of new wisdom overnight, but it was certainly an important milestone, whichever way you looked at it. Sirius was definitely holding himself in a slightly different way; Remus was sure.

Unfortunately, the carefree morning ended there. As they finished their meal and were preparing to get up for their first lesson (History of Magic) their passage out of the hall was blocked.

"Sirius." A stern voice said.

Narcissa Black stood before them. At fifteen she was taller than all four marauders. She was a fairly attractive girl, Remus thought; if a little pinched about the face. She didn't have her elder sister's mad look, and had dyed and straightened her long hair so that it hung in a gorgeous platinum sheet, which shimmered when it caught the light.

She stood before them with her arms crossed, Regulus skulking at her side.

“Cissy.” Sirius nodded in greeting. She flinched, but didn’t chastise him.

“It’s your birthday.” She said.

“Well, I was aware.”

She rolled her eyes. It seemed she didn’t have her sister’s temper, either, which Remus was glad for.

“You’re to eat with us this evening.”

“Come and sit at the Gryffindor table if you absolutely have to.”

“No.” She narrowed her grey eyes, “Your mother has given strict instructions. We’ll eat privately, in the Slytherin common room, like last year.”

“No!” Sirius lost his newfound maturity and suddenly seemed very much a child, practically stamping his foot, “I want to eat with my friends.”

“You can eat with them any time you want.” Narcissa snapped, her hands on her hips now.

“Birthdays are *family* occasions.”

Regulus looked at his feet, still standing just behind his cousin. Sirius was still annoyed, but finally nodded his assent. James placed a hand on his shoulder; a harmless gesture, but Regulus looked up and stared intently, as if they were doing something foul.

Once a time had been set for dinner, the two Slytherin Blacks left, and the marauders stared after them. James looked at Sirius,

“Bad luck,” he commiserated, “Want to bunk off lessons?”

“Nah,” Sirius shook his head, “I’ll just take a few dung bombs with me to dinner.”

“We can see if that time-bomb spell works!”

“Perfect.”

* * *

Sirius was gone for a long while after dinner. James paced the dorm room, checking his watch every few minutes and wondering out loud whether he ought to go and stand outside the dungeons and shout.

“We need to start working on your map again, Lupin,” he said, running his hands through his (already catastrophic) hair, “Get everyone tagged, so we know where they are at all times.”

“We’re a long way off that,” Remus replied from his bed, where he was reading a book. “Still haven’t mapped any of the east wing. I can do some over Christmas.”

“No,” James stopped still in the middle of the room, “You and Black are coming to mine for Christmas.”

Remus stared at him and swallowed awkwardly,

“James, I can’t, you know I can’t.”

James waved a hand, resuming his pacing.

“I’ll sort it all out with dad, don’t worry. Full moon’s on the twentieth, I checked. We can all hang out here until then and leave on the twenty-first.”

Remus was speechless, but it didn’t matter. James decided quickly after that to don his cloak and go looking for Sirius. Peter, rather predictably, followed him, but Remus was enjoying his book and let them go. He lolled on the bed, and thought about putting a record on. James and Peter had called for a ban on Bowie until the end of the year, but if they weren’t in the room...

At the beginning of the year Remus had been so taken in by Sirius’s excitement that he hadn’t told him that he had known all about Ziggy Stardust – in fact, everyone in the muggle world, pretty much, had been talking about him all summer.

Sometime in mid-July, Remus had sat in the rec room after tea with a few of the older boys to watch *Top of the Pops*. Their TV was still black and white, but Remus felt as though he had seen the performance in colour. David Bowie was like no one he had ever seen before. All of them had sat staring with their mouths wide open as the slender, alien looking man bopped across the stage in a patchwork leotard. He was pale as snow, his hair was long at the back, and stuck up wildly on top, his eyes were arresting; one pupil larger than the other – he was wearing *makeup*. Remus had at once wanted to know him and to be him. When David slung his arm around the tall, fair haired guitarist, Remus’ stomach had done an odd sort of flip, and as the two men sang into the same microphone, their cheeks pressed close together, one of the St Edmund’s care workers had marched over and turned off the television set. *Nasty queers*, he had said, *disgusting putting that sort of thing on telly when kiddies might see it*.

Remus thought about it more than he wanted to.

When the two other boys returned, it was with a white faced Sirius. He looked worse than he usually did after an encounter with his family; closed off and utterly joyless. Even his eyes looked a little less bright, veering into grey.

“What’s up?” Remus stood up, concerned.

“It’s terrible.” Sirius said. “Really, really terrible. Vile. The worst, most unthinkable... Horrific.” He threw himself onto his bed, face down.

“He’s been like this since we found him in the dungeons,” James explained, “Nothing but adjectives.”

“Superlative adjectives.” Sirius corrected, muffled slightly by his pillow.

“Yeah yeah, you’re being dramatic,” James sighed. He ran his fingers through his hair again. He’d be bald before he saw thirty, Remus thought. “Want to tell us *why*?! ”

Sirius rolled onto his back, staring up at the canopy of his bed.

“I’m getting married.”

“What?!” James and Peter looked just as shocked as Remus, so at least he knew it wasn’t a normal wizard thing.

“Narcissa told me.” He nodded, still staring blankly upwards, “Usually they wouldn’t make a

match until I was of age, like with Bellatrix, but Cissy says they've decided to tighten the reigns in my case."

"Make a *match*?!" James sounded flabbergasted, "The Blacks don't still have arranged marriages, surely?"

"Of course we do." Sirius heaved a sigh, "*Noble and most ancient*, et cetera, et cetera... They want to hold the betrothal ceremony next summer. I'm supposed to 'buck my ideas up' in time for it. Then the wedding is happening as soon as I finish Hogwarts. Doubt you lot'll be invited."

"That's mad! That's medieval! That's..."

"My mother." Sirius finished.

"Um," Remus felt rude interrupting, but his curiosity was getting the better of him, "Who are you supposed to be marrying?"

Sirius sat up.

"That's the twist in the dragon's tail, isn't it," he said, angrily, "That's my mother's *pièce de résistance*," he pronounced the French beautifully, with a perfect accent. Even in his darkest rages Sirius Black could announce.

"Who?!"

"Cissy."

"What?!"

"Narcissa?!"

"Your cousin?!"

"Narcissa *Black*?!"

Sirius nodded. His shoulder's sagged. The closed off look returned to his face and he lay back down.

"Apparently they're looking to reign her in too. Andromeda – her sister, y'know, the only normal one – she's pregnant, according to Cissy. They're closing ranks, trying to prevent any more dirty blood from getting in."

"But there have to be other pure blood girls out there," James reasoned, "And I thought she and that Malfoy creep were going out?"

"They are," Sirius nodded, "She's as pissed off about it as I am, believe me. Talk about wedded bliss."

"What about Regulus?" James was asking. He looked as though his mind was working a mile a minute.

"What about him?" Sirius said, bitterly, "Think *he* fancies her instead?"

"She's quite pretty," Peter said, meekly. Sirius gave him a look that could shatter glass.

"She's my *cousin* you dolt."

“All right,” James held up an authoritative hand, “No need for name calling, we’re just trying to help.” Remus couldn’t see how exactly Peter was helping, but he bit his tongue and let James continue. “I meant, did Regulus *say* anything? He was there, wasn’t he?”

“Not. A. Word.” Sirius glowered, and no one mentioned his brother again.

“Right, well.” James pushed his glasses up his nose, “We’ve got until next summer. And we’ve got Narcissa on our side, believe it or not. So, I’d say it’s not hopeless.”

“You don’t know what hopeless is until you’ve met my mother.” Sirius said.

“And *she* doesn’t know what a marauder is.” James said firmly. “Gentlemen,” He looked at them each, in turn. Remus could see exactly what was coming. “We have a new mission.”

Chapter End Notes

The Top of the Pops performance Remus is remembering is this one:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MrP83SqT9E>

(I hope that works - search YouTube for 'Star Man, Top of the Pops', if not)

Second Year: Assumptions

How on earth could you get yourself out of an engagement? Remus wondered to himself, as he made his way down to the dungeons on Sunday evening. He was alone; Lily had asked him to check on the potion they were working on one more time before handing it in the next day. He personally thought it was overkill, but was also guiltily aware that Evans had so far done the lion's share of the work.

Sirius's problem had been ticking away in the back of his mind all day. James had charged them all with coming up with a solution by Christmas, but Remus couldn't see what might be done. He'd never thought about engagement, or marriage, or family honour before. Those were all grown up things. Thirteen-year-old boys certainly weren't supposed to worry about them. But then, he supposed, turning the final bend in the staircase, nor were *twelve*-year-old boys supposed to worry about transforming into monsters once a month.

He sighed heavily, pushing the door to the Potions classroom open. To his disgust, Severus Snape was in there already, stirring his own potion. Their eyes met, and Remus froze for a moment, before squaring his shoulders, raising his chin and walking straight over to his own cauldron, choosing to ignore the other boy.

But he couldn't help but notice that his potion was a slightly different colour from Snape's, which couldn't be a good sign. Theirs was a bold, royal blue, much darker than it ought to be. Snape had obviously noticed too.

"You need to add more lavender." He said, nasally, not looking up from his stirring. "At least another teaspoon."

"Yeah, right." Remus frowned, "S'if I'm going to take advice off you."

"I'm hardly going to ruin Lily's potion, am I?!" Snape spat back.

Remus considered this. It was true that despite Severus' generally unpleasant demeanour, the only other thing the marauders knew about him was that he would do almost anything for Lily Evans. It was weird, but Remus wasn't one to judge anyone for being weird.

He spooned in some more lavender and stirred. At once, the potion took on a paler, sky blue hue, and a lovely dreamy aroma rose from it. Snape made a smug clicking noise with his tongue, and closed the lid on his own cauldron, getting ready to leave.

"Hiya Sev!" a voice came from the doorway, "Oh, Remus..."

It was Lily. She looked a bit embarrassed. Remus frowned,

"Thought we agreed I was checking it tonight?"

"Um, yes, we did... I was just... double checking." Her usually pale cheeks were bright red.

"Didn't think I'd show up?"

Snape snorted, derisively, on his way out. Remus fought the urge to throw a spoon at the back of his greasy head. Lily didn't notice, she had already crossed the room, and was looking down into the cauldron.

“Well, you do get a lot of detentions,” she said, diplomatically. Severus swept out of the room. “Oh wow, it looks much better than it did this morning. Did you do something?”

“Added more lavender.”

“Really? Nice one, it looks exactly right now.”

“Well...” he rubbed the back of his head, glancing at the door. Snape was out of earshot. “Yeah, I just thought it needed some, I s’pose.”

“Nothing left to do, then. Are you on your way back to the common room?”

“Yeah.”

They walked together. Lily was in a good mood,

“We work quite well together, don’t we?” She smiled at him. “It’s a nice change from Sev, anyway, you’re much more easy going.”

Remus had never thought of himself as easy going before. It was a nice thing for her to say, but then compared to Snape anyone might seem relaxed.

“What’s the thing with you and him anyway?” He asked.

“He’s my best friend.” Lily answered promptly, as if she had to justify this all the time. “We’ve known each other ages.”

“Oh, right.”

“He’s not as bad as you think he is,” she said, glancing at him sideways, “He can be really kind. And funny.”

“Why’s he hang about with Mulciber and the pureblood lot, then?”

“Well if we’re going to base our assumptions on people based on their *friends*,” Lily looked at him very pointedly.

“What’s wrong with my friends?!” Remus was shocked. Everyone loved James and Sirius. Lily rolled her eyes.

“They’re all heirs to pureblood houses, aren’t they?” She tossed her auburn curls, “Plus they’re massive show-offs. Potter thinks he’s god’s gift and Black is... well, he’s a Black, isn’t he? Even *I* know about them, and I’m muggle born. I s’pose Peter’s ok, but it’s sad the way he follows them around everywhere.”

“I follow them around too.”

“Yeah, you do.” She looked at him again, cheekily.

“You’re wrong about them.” Remus said, “I mean... ok, you’re right about them showing off, but they’re not just... there’s more to them.”

“Well then you’ll just have to accept that there’s more to Severus, won’t you?”

She was harder to argue with than Sirius. Remus shrugged, noncommittally. It occurred to him that Lily might be able to help with their present conundrum. After all, weddings and engagements

were girl things, weren't they? At least she might offer another perspective.

"Evans?" he said, thoughtfully, "You're quite clever..."

"Oh, cheers very much."

"Sorry. I mean – you're cleverer than me."

"Much better."

He grinned, rubbing the back of his head.

"What would you do if your family was making you get married to someone you didn't want to?"

She frowned, as if that was not at all what she had expected.

"Liker an arranged marriage? I thought you lived in a foster home?"

"A children's home," he corrected. "They're different. Anyway, it's not me, it's... someone else."

"Um..." She looked stumped, which didn't give Remus much hope. "Gosh, I mean, it's not something my parents would ever do. But if they did... I'd be really angry, obviously. And hurt."

"Hurt?" He asked, puzzled.

"Well, obviously. Your parents are supposed to love you and want what's best for you... making a decision like that on your behalf is the complete opposite."

"Right," he nodded, though he didn't really understand, "Well this person er... doesn't really get on with their parents anyway."

"Even so," Lily shrugged, "That doesn't mean they're not hurt by it. You should be able to trust the people who raised you."

"Oh, ok." Remus didn't know what to say to that. He had a horrible churning sensation in his stomach – the same feeling he used to get when called upon to read out loud. Lily hadn't noticed. They were almost at the common room now.

"I still don't know what I'd do," she sighed, "It's like the only option is to defy them – the parents. But that's going to cause all sorts of problems... Who is this about? Go on, tell me!"

Remus shook his head,

"Can't. Sorry."

Lily nodded, understanding. Remus smiled at her. She had an immensely soothing presence.

"*Flibbertigibbet*," Lily said to the portrait, which swung open for them to crawl through.

James had not long returned from quidditch practice and was still in his red flying robes. He sat on one of the sofas flicking Zonko's bursting beans into the fireplace, where they burst in a riot of colour like miniature fireworks. Sirius lay on the rug beneath him reading a book on hexes he'd brought from home.

"Alright, Lupin?" James grinned. Remus nodded to Lily and went over to his friends. The redhead went straight up the stairs to the girl's dorm. "Dumped us for Evans, have you?" James asked,

smirking.

“Potions.” Remus replied.

“Right. You friends with her now?”

“Sort of,” Remus shrugged, “She’s all right. Hates you two.”

“What?!” They both sat up, looking affronted.

“But everyone likes us!” Sirius said, “We’re loveable rogues!”

“She thinks you’re show offs.”

James gasped, dramatically.

“How dare she! We’ll have to win her over.”

“Why bother,” Sirius rolled over, returning to his book, “She’s friends with Snivellus, she clearly has no taste.”

“Did she really say that?” James was asking Remus. He nodded,

“She said you think you’re god’s gift.”

“What does that mea-“

“It’s a muggle expression,” Remus explained, “Means she thinks you’re full of yourself.”

“She thinks that?”

“Well,” Remus looked at him, “You sort of are, to be honest.”

James laughed. Remus sat beside him, grabbing a handful of the Zonko beans himself and flinging them into the fire, one by one. He and James shortly made a game of it, seeking who could create the biggest explosions by hitting the embers just right.

“Forgot to say,” James said, once the bag of beans was empty, “Got the owl from dad today – he’s spoken to McGonagall and got permission for us to have you over Christmas.”

“What? Really?!” Remus was fascinated. Why would a grownup who had never met him before want to intervene on his behalf? He made a mental note never to underestimate the power of James’s will ever again.

“Yeah, doesn’t think he can get you for the summer, though. Sorry.”

Remus shook his head, wordlessly. He ought to say thank you, but he hardly knew how.

“Just waiting for you now, mate,” James nudged Sirius with his foot, “Have you sorted it out with your mum? Say you’re going to the Pettigrew’s again.”

“Not bothering,” Sirius replied, still reading, “Just going to go to yours without saying anything.”

Sirius was rarely ever in contact with his parents, but since the Narcissa development he had been ignoring their owls altogether. Remus wasn’t sure that silence was the best way for Sirius to express his discontent, but as Lily had just reminded him, Remus knew very little about families.

“Mum won’t like it,” James chewed his lip.

“Don’t tell her, then.” Sirius turned his page.

James and Remus exchanged a look. They had to do something about the engagement soon; the thought of Sirius being in this mood for five more years was a very grim one indeed.

Second Year: December Moon

The Hogwarts Express left Hogsmeade station for Christmas on Saturday 16th December that year, meaning that once the full moon had passed, James, Sirius and Remus had to find other means of getting to the Potters' family home.

McGonagall, after lecturing Remus on not letting any other students in on his secret, was sympathetic to the marauder's wishes, and allowed them to use the floo connection in her office 'just this once'. Remus didn't mind the lecture so much, but he was terrified of using the floo network for the first time. He'd heard all sorts of horror stories from fellow students, and it didn't help that he was usually queasy for a few days after the full moon anyway.

Sirius received a howler every morning after the 16th demanding that he come home at once, but he simply tossed the scarlet envelopes into the fireplace, where Walpurga Black's screams echoed up into the chimney stacks. James was clearly unnerved by this behaviour, but didn't say anything. Sirius was always up for a fight lately, and it was just better to steer clear. Unfortunately, as the full moon drew nearer, Remus also had a very short fuse. The two boys bickered over anything and everything, and poor James had to step between the pair more than once.

"Just write back to her for god's sake." Remus groaned on the morning of the 20th, throwing a pillow at Sirius from his bed. He'd been woken early for the third morning in a row by a howler,

"IF YOU THINK YOU CAN ESCAPE YOUR BIRTH RIGHT IN THIS COWARDLY FASHION THEN YOU HAVE ANOTHER THING COMING!" It wailed, echoing through Gryffindor tower like a banshee.

"Stay out of it, Lupin," Sirius flung the pillow back at him.

"How am I supposed to stay out of it when it's in our bloody bedroom every morning?!" Remus growled, getting up now.

"I'm *so* sorry to inconvenience you!" Sirius retorted, dripping with sarcasm. He looked rough, as if he hadn't slept properly at all, but Remus was in too much of a bad mood to care, and his transformation was only hours away.

"How about not acting like a spoilt brat for five minutes?!" He snapped, "You're so bloody selfish."

"I'm not *asking* her to send them! At least I actually get post, at least people *care* enough about me to—"

Remus threw himself on top of Sirius and began thumping him as hard as he could, incandescent with rage.

"SHUT. UP." He grunted, landing a decent punch right on Sirius's left cheek. Sirius, though extremely adept at caustic insults, was not much of a fighter. He gasped and tried to push Remus away, eventually grabbing for his wand,

"*Mordeo!*" He hissed, aiming at Remus's face. At once, Remus let go, tumbling backwards onto the bed, clutching his forehead. A horrible stinging sensation radiated from the spot Sirius had cursed,

“You wanker!” He yelled, feeling his face tightening and swelling up.

“You deserved it!”

“Sirius!” James had clambered out of bed too late. “You *cursed* him?! You bloody *cursed* him?!”

Sirius was looking less sure of himself now,

“He started it!”

“He didn’t even have his wand on him!”

Remus had climbed off the bed and was staring at himself in the wardrobe mirror. He looked as though he had rolled through a stinging nettle bush backwards. His skin was red and shiny, taut and swelling at a worrying rate.

“Does it hurt?” James asked, tentatively.

Remus shook his head, though it did – a lot.

“I’m going to the hospital wing.” He said. “Don’t come with me.” He snapped, seeing James pulling on his dressing gown. As he marched out of the room still in his pyjamas, he heard James mutter,

“Attacking someone who’s unarmed is really fucking low, Black.”

* * *

Madam Pomfrey healed him quickly using the counter-jinx, but she was very annoyed about it.

“Who did it?” She asked him, “If it was Potter or Black then I want to hear about it – I *told* Minerva it was a bad idea to let you go away for Christmas.”

“Why shouldn’t I go?” Remus asked, scandalised, “Sirius is going!”

“Mr Black doesn’t have your limitations.”

“But we’re not going ‘til tomorrow, it’s right *after* the full moon, that’s the safest—”

“I’m thinking of *your* health, Remus! You’re very fragile—”

“I am **not** fragile!” Remus seethed.

“Of course not, dear,” she said, not really listening to him. “Now sit there quietly for a bit, eh? Have you had breakfast?”

Madam Pomfrey made him stay in the hospital wing all day in his pyjamas. The medi-witch had been working on a new potion that she hoped might make his transformation smoother. She let him borrow some of her books, so it wasn’t too bad, but he felt like an invalid all the same. His face was still a bit tingly from Sirius’s curse, though the swelling had gone down substantially. It might be a good one to use on Snape, he made a mental note to remember to ask Sirius exactly how he’d done it.

At about one o’clock, just after lunch, James and Sirius came to see him. Madam Pomfrey gave them a sound telling off, first.

“Cursing your fellow house mate! Cursing your *dorm* mate, for goodness sake! In my day you’d have been flogged! And Professor McGonagall has informed me that you know about his special circumstances! One might think you’d have more sense!”

James made copious apologies, and Sirius, who barely flinched at his mother’s obscene chastisements anymore, hung his head looking utterly ashamed. Eventually, Remus guessed that this must have been enough to satisfy the school nurse, who allowed them over to see him. They stood at the end of the bed like mourners, barely meeting his eye.

“We’re really sorry, Remus,” James started. Remus clicked his tongue,

“*You* never did anything.”

James kicked Sirius, who looked up too,

“*I’m* really sorry, Remus.” He had a heavy dark bruise high on his left cheek and his eyes looked a little over bright, Remus wondered if Sirius had cried about it. The thought made him feel funny. He shook his head, no longer angry,

“I started it. Sorry I hit you.”

“Sorry about the howler.”

“Sorry your mum’s a nightmare.”

“Sorry you’re a werewolf.”

They both laughed, and everything was forgiven.

“Will she let you out now?” James asked, “Few hours still ‘til the moon.”

Remus shook his head,

“Nah, she wants to try some new potion.”

“I didn’t know there was a cure!”

“There isn’t,” Remus said, quickly, “This is just a... I think it’s to make the transformation, y’know... easier.”

They both looked at him, puzzled. He shifted uncomfortably,

“Like a painkiller, I think. Muggle ones don’t work.”

“Does it hurt, then?” Sirius asked, cocking his head. Now that the storm had passed he was back to seeing Remus as an interesting specimen.

“Well, yeah.” Remus frowned. He had assumed they knew a lot more than him, having grown up in the wizarding world, so he was surprised that they didn’t know about the pain. For a long time, the pain was the only thing he had known.

To his surprise and delight, James and Sirius elected to stay in the hospital wing with Remus for the rest of the afternoon. They played a few riotous games of exploding snap, before Madam Pomfrey sternly told them to quiet down, so they switched to gobstones. As the evening drew in, they didn’t go down for dinner, but ate the same hospital food as he did.

This was no great thing for them – James and Sirius treated it as any other afternoon; the hospital bed was just an extension of their dorm. For Remus it was everything – it was time that would otherwise be spent anxious and alone. It was the closest thing to family he could imagine.

McGonagall came and chased them out, eventually, ready to lead Remus to the shack. He went peacefully, with a soft smile on his lips and laughter still echoing in his ears. Madam Pomfrey's painkilling potion had no effect – but Remus found the transformation slightly more tolerable all the same.

* * *

James and Sirius arrived first thing the next morning. Remus was dozing in his bed, having been brought back into the castle at dawn. His face hurt, and he knew it wasn't from the curse anymore. Madam Pomfrey had left a hand mirror on his bedside table, glass down, but he had been too tired to look yet. He was woken by the sharp gasp of breath which came from either James or Sirius, he wasn't sure who. When he opened his eyes they had both rearranged their expressions into stoic cheer.

"Alright, mate?" James said, with a half-smile, as you might address a child.

"Alright." Remus croaked, hauling himself up. It must be bad. He lifted the heavy mirror and turned it towards his face. Ah.

The cut looked half-healed already, thanks to Pomfrey's ministrations, but it was still a shock. The scab was hard and black, edged with tender red skin. It stretched from the inner corner of one eye, up over the bridge of his nose diagonally down towards the centre of his opposite cheek. He couldn't remember much, but it looked as though he'd almost split his face wide open.

"My beautiful face," he said, weakly, attempting sarcasm, but feeling dreadful. Now everyone would know. So far he'd been able to hide the worst of his scars under his robes, but he knew now that it had only been a matter of time before his luck ran out in that regard.

"It's not that bad," James said, quickly, "It'll heal really fast, I bet..."

"How did—" Sirius began, but was interrupted by Madam Pomfrey who came storming over,

"You two back again!" They stepped back, sharply, as if frightened of her, showing deference they never showed for McGonagall. The nurse pulled the curtain around Remus's bed, closing it in their faces. "Ah, you've had a look, have you?" She addressed Remus now, in a much softer tone, "I know it looks bad, but it'll pale just like the others. Should be barely noticeable by the new year."

Remus somehow didn't believe her – even his most faded scars were still very noticeable. She took a closer look, then smoothed a clear ointment over the cut,

"Take this with you," she instructed, handing him the jar, "Apply every morning and evening. Does it hurt, still?"

He shook his head. She clucked her tongue sceptically, "Well, even so. It might itch a bit as it heals. Perhaps we could try trimming your nails down next month? Though I suppose the claws come in anyway." She sighed, sounding frustrated, "Your face must still have been irritated even after we got the swelling down."

"It's fine," Remus shrugged her off. He was keenly aware of his friends on the other side of the curtain, and wanted her to go away. "Can I go now? I feel ok."

“Wouldn’t you rather get a bit more sleep?”

“No.” He shook his head vehemently, “I’m hungry – I want to go down for breakfast.” He knew that would work; she was always on at him to eat more.

“Well... fine. Get dressed and off you pop.”

Sirius was very quiet during breakfast, leaving James and Remus to maintain the conversation – something neither of them had much practice at by themselves. Once fed, they went upstairs to pack because Sirius and Remus had left it to the last minute. James, frustrated by their lack of foresight, marched to McGonagall’s office to see if everything was ready for their journey, leaving them to it.

Remus packed a few things – he hadn’t got the others any presents, and he’d made them all promise not to get him anything either. It wasn’t fair. Matron had sent ahead a small package, so there was that. He threw in some clothes – the others probably wore robes at home, but the only robes Remus owned were his school uniform (and he wasn’t very sure he actually *owned* that, or whether it was just on loan), so he just shoved in his muggle clothes.

Packed, Remus turned to find Sirius standing directly behind him, looking even worse than he had the day before.

“What’s up?” Remus asked, startled.

“It’s my fault.” Sirius replied, his voice strangely flat, “I heard Pomfrey say so.”

“Eh?”

“Your face... I cursed it, then when you turned you scratched it...”

“Oh.” Remus raised his fingers to his face, self-consciously. Sirius looked away. “It’s not really your fault,” Remus said, awkwardly, “I mean, I scratch everywhere else, too. Bound to happen eventually.”

“Why do you do it?”

Sirius had asked that once before, when looking at his old scars. This time Remus could tell that he really understood what he was asking. But Remus still didn’t have an answer.

“I dunno. I don’t remember.”

“You don’t remember anything at all?”

“Not really. I know I’m always hungry – like I’ve been starving all my life. And angry.”

“About what?”

Remus shook his head,

“Just angry.”

“I’m so sorry, Remus.” Sirius looked sad again. Remus couldn’t bear it,

“Oh, shut up.” He said, half joking, “You wouldn’t think twice about cursing James or Peter.”

“Yeah, but you’re...”

“Don’t say it.” He’d been afraid this might happen, “*Please* don’t treat me like I’m sick, or different, or whatever. It’s one night a month. If I punch you, you’re allowed to curse me, ok?”

Sirius looked like he wanted to laugh,

“Are you saying you’re planning to punch me again?”

Remus threw a sock at him,

“If you don’t sort out those bastard howlers, maybe.”

* * *

Travelling by floo powder was nothing compared to feeling your own spine elongate every month, and Remus wasn’t sure what all the fuss had been about. He was the second to step out of the fireplace into the Potter’s lounge, after James. Brushing soot from his shoulders he quickly hopped off the hearth rug to make room for Sirius, and watched as James was pulled into a hearty embrace by both of his parents.

Mr and Mrs Potter were quite a bit older than Remus had imagined, but both had kind, merry faces that shared familiar features with their son. Mr Potter’s hair was white as snow, but stuck up at every angle exactly like James’s. Mrs Potter had his winning smile and warm hazel eyes. They both hugged Sirius too, while Remus shrank back, feeling horribly out of place.

Finally, Mrs Potter turned her sunny smile on him. Thankfully she did not make to hug him too, perhaps sensing that he was uncomfortable. She simply nodded at him gently,

“Hello, Remus, we’ve heard ever so much about you, I’m so glad you’re spending Christmas with us.”

Remus smiled back shyly, but couldn’t bring himself to speak. It didn’t matter; James and Sirius were chattering nineteen to the dozen with Mr Potter, who looked like a schoolboy himself, eyes twinkling with fun and mischief.

The sitting room – Remus supposed it was a sitting room, as it had three sofas in it – was the biggest he’d ever been in, with wide, tall windows letting in soft winter sunlight that pooled onto the polished hardwood floors. A gigantic Christmas tree stood in one corner, glimmering with silver dust and surrounded by a mountain of brightly wrapped presents.

Paper chains and streamers were draped across the ceiling and along the picture rails, and even the magical portraits had decorated their frames with fairy lights. As they were led through the house (“For goodness sakes”, Fleamont, let the boys put their things away before you start planning whatever it is I know you’re planning,”) he found that every room, even the hallways were decorated with lights, tinsel and hundreds and hundreds of festive cards. The Potter’s must be very popular wizards indeed. They were certainly wealthy – the sweeping mahogany staircase continued up three more flights.

James’s bedroom was big enough for all three of them – bigger than their dorm room at Hogwarts, with a king sized four poster bed, but Remus was surprised to find that there were four equally large bedrooms which were unoccupied. Sirius had already claimed the one next to James, so Remus put his bag in the third room, wondering what it would be like to sleep alone for the first time.

“Come on then, lads!” Mr Potter yelled up the stairs in a booming voice, “It’s been snowing all afternoon and I’ve got the toboggans ready!”

Second Year: Christmas with the Potters

Chapter Notes

CW - some unpleasant family stuff in here that could be construed as child abuse (Sirius & Walpurga obvs)

Remus had thought that nothing could be much better than Christmas at Hogwarts, which was (quite literally) magical. Christmas at the Potter's, however, was an entirely different experience that seemed only to get better.

First there was tobogganing down the snowy slopes in the back garden – though at over five hundred acres, no one could really call it a garden. Peter, who lived further down in the main village, came out to join them as soon as he heard they had arrived, and they had an extremely noisy and violent afternoon careering down the hillsides and playing complex wargames with snowball ammunition. Mr Potter even joined in; sprightly for his age and with the considerable advantage of being able to use magic.

Mrs Potter called them all in for lunch and made them all change out of their freezing wet clothes. They sat by the fireplace, warm and dry eating hot toasted teacakes smeared with rich yellow butter. In the afternoon they wanted to go out again, but Mr Potter had gone to lie down and Mrs Potter didn't want them to go out so close to nightfall. Instead they helped her decorate an enormous Christmas cake with white royal icing and tiny magical figurines, then to wrap presents for the neighbours and their house elves,

"We never got anything for the house elf," Sirius said matter-of-factly, his fingers hopelessly bound up in some spell-o-tape, "Mind you, Kreacher's a moody git; I doubt he wants anything."

"They'll take gifts as long as it's something edible, I find," Mrs Potter replied, smiling, "No clothes, of course, that only upsets them."

"Tell mum what your lot does to house elves, Sirius," James grinned, binding his friend's hands up even more. Sirius laughed, lightly,

"Mounts their heads." He said, "Once they're dead. At least, I *think* we wait until they're dead... Kreacher's the only house elf I remember."

"Goodness," said Mrs Potter, "I had rather thought that tradition had died out."

"Not with the Blacks," Sirius sighed. Remus could tell that he was thinking about the betrothal again.

"You're making a lovely job of that, Remus," Mrs Potter observed, glancing over at the book he was wrapping for Mrs Pettigrew. "Unlike *some* naughty boys I could mention..." she turned a stern gaze upon her son and his best friend, now attempting to tape their hands to the table top.

Remus smiled at her, politely, feeling the fresh cut on his face pull at his skin. He still hadn't really said anything to either of James's parents yet. He'd always been told to be seen and not heard around older people – and he had never been to a friend's house before. Sirius, by contrast, was

completely at ease, Remus had never seen him happier. He doted on Mrs Potter as if she was his own mother – if he'd *liked* his own mother, of course.

Remus yawned, more widely than he meant to, trying to hide behind his hands, ducking his head embarrassed. He had only slept a few hours that morning following the moon, and an afternoon of snowball manoeuvres had left him exhausted.

"You'd better go up to bed, dear," Mrs Potter said, ignoring the fact that it was only three o'clock in the afternoon. Remus wondered if James had told his parents about him – they must know, McGonagall might not have let him come otherwise.

"Oh, you're all right, aren't you, Lupin?" Sirius cajoled, "Peter's coming back in a bit, we can go out again."

Remus blinked at him, then looked at James for help.

"Leave him alone, Sirius," Mrs Potter chided, "The poor boy's dead on his feet. Come on, dear, off you go."

Gratefully, Remus got up from the kitchen table and made his way up to bed. As he changed into his night things, he couldn't help but steal another glance at himself in the mirror, now that he was properly alone. Perhaps it was having been out in the cold, but the scar looked worse than it had that morning, the contrast harsher with his pale skin. Would his face always surprise him, now? Would he always catch a glimpse of himself in some mirror or shining surface and jump? Would other people be afraid of him?

There was a soft tap at the door, just as Remus was about to put on the ointment Madam Pomfrey had given him. It was Sirius, Remus caught his scent before he even knocked.

"Alright?" The dark haired boy crept inside, speaking quietly. He held a pewter goblet in his hand. "James's mum sent you this. It's a healing draught, I think."

"Oh, thanks." Remus nodded tiredly. Sirius set it down on the bedside table.

"You ok?"

"Fine. Just tired, mate."

"Were we too... y'know, rough or something?"

"No!" Remus said, very firmly, probably sounding angrier than he meant to. "It's nothing to do with you two, it's just the fact that I was up all night howling at the bloody moon and trying to rip my own face off. I'm tired."

Remus had to sit down, the effort of the outburst made him dizzy.

"Sorry." Sirius said, even more quietly. It was the second time he'd apologised that day, and Remus hated the sound of it. "I'll leave you." He closed the door.

Remus couldn't bring himself to start worrying about hurting Sirius's feelings. He smeared on some of the ointment, then sniffed the goblet Mrs Potter had sent. He recognised it as something he'd had before at Hogwarts, which would trigger instant sleep. Getting into bed, he drained it quickly, and closed his eyes.

* * *

The remaining days before Christmas passed quickly, and Remus was able to experience real family life for the first time. Mr and Mrs Potter had to be the perfect parents – they were kind and sure, always smiling and full of fun. Remus hadn't known that adults could be that way. He hadn't known that people could grow up like that. It was clearer than ever why James was the way he was – as brimming with love and blind confidence as Remus was brimming with rage. It was obvious, too, why Sirius was so drawn to the family. He had an unquenchable thirst for love, and the Potters had an endless supply.

The four boys tramped all over the surrounding countryside in the snow, bundled up in their warm Gryffindor scarves, hats and gloves. In the evenings they played card games, helped Mrs Potter prepare dinner and listened to Mr Potter telling ghost stories around the fireplace. They made mince pies and paper chains, they built snow-wizards and igloos, and they slept so soundly in their beds at night that not even a howler could have woken them.

Unfortunately, it was not to last. While the Black's had stopped sending howlers, they had not forgotten their wayward son and tried a new tact on Christmas eve, with devastating consequences for the marauders.

They were drinking warm butterbeer and sitting on the hearth rug. James and Sirius were playing gobstones, very loudly, and Mr Potter was teaching Remus to play chess. The old man had been horrified that Remus didn't know how, and Remus was surprised to find himself actually quite enjoying the game. The whole room felt warm and safe, heavy curtains drawn against the cold and dark, tree lights twinkling softly and the fire popping and crackling beside them. The clock had just struck nine, and Mrs Potter was keen to send them all to bed, when there was a loud *CRACK* just outside the window.

Mr and Mrs Potter shared a quick glance, and Remus's ears pricked like a dog. The smell of spent magic permeated the air, like burnt toast. Something dark and unsavoury. There was a firm, hollow knock at the door.

"Weren't expecting anyone, were we Effie?" Mr Potter frowned slightly at his wife. She shook her head, and they both listened.

The Potter's house elf, Gully, went scampering towards the front door to answer it. There were stilted voices in the hall, and Gully came hurrying in.

"Oh, Mr Potter, Mr Potter, she's come for young master Black, she's telling me she's his mother! I told them to wait there for you." The elf was wringing his hands anxiously, clearly very confused by this turn of events.

Sirius and James looked at each other. Sirius's face was white – he looked like he might be sick.

"She wouldn't..." He whispered.

Mr Potter was already up and out of the door. There were raised voices in the hallway now – Remus recognised Mrs Black's sharp tone from her horrid letters.

"Sirius," Mrs Potter said, gently, "Did your parents give you permission to visit us, dear?" He looked at the floor. She clucked her tongue. "Oh, sweetheart." She said, sounding very sad.

"Don't make him leave, mum!" James stood up, "He hates them!"

"They're his parents, James."

"Sirius!" Mr Potter called from the hall.

Sirius got up, James did too. Remus didn't want to, he wanted to stay by the fire where they'd all been so happy just moments beforehand. But Mrs Potter had stood up too, and this was one of those times the marauders had to present a united front, no matter how frightening Sirius's mother was.

They all filed out into the hall. Remus had seen Mrs Black once before, the first time he'd boarded the Hogwarts Express. Back then he had simply thought she looked very severe, and that she looked like Sirius. She still looked severe – her hair was slicked back and pulled up in a high bun which coiled like a serpent at the crown of her head, fixed with an emerald pin. Her eyes were dark, not as blue as Sirius's, but she had that Black family bone structure and superior look. She was shorter than Mr Potter, but still managed to gaze at him as though he was filth on her boot. Her look sharpened as she saw James and Remus appear.

"Sirius." She said, coldly, narrowing her eyes at her eldest son. "You will come with me at once. Kreacher!" She snapped her fingers and an old, wizened looking house elf emerged from behind her robes. "Go upstairs and fetch master Black's things." The house elf bowed deeply, kissing the silver capped toes of Mrs Black's pointed boots, and scurrying upstairs.

"Good evening, Walpurga," Mrs Potter said, pleasantly, as if there was no tension at all, "May I offer you a drink? We were just about to crack out the mince pies, weren't we, boys?"

Mrs Black ignored her, looking straight at Sirius,

"Put on your cloak. We're leaving now."

"But mother, I--"

"Don't you dare speak to me." She hissed, eyes flashing.

Remus wanted to run away; she was worse than Matron one hundred times over. She was worse than Bellatrix and Snape and every nasty person he had ever met. The thought of letting Sirius go with her made his insides twist. Mr and Mrs Potter seemed to be suffering from the same crisis,

"Walpurga, why not let him stay?" Mrs Potter tried, "I know he's been a bit naughty, but there's no harm done. We can have him for lunch and send him back before dinner tomorrow. They've all been having such a nice time together."

Mrs Black let out a short, crackling laugh, as if the her son's enjoyment was the least of her concerns. She eyed James, her gaze raking over his mess of hair, then Remus, staring pointedly at his new scar. Remus looked at his feet, terrified. She'd know. She'd know straight away.

Kreacher came scuttling back down the stairs, followed by a very affronted looking Gully. Sirius's trunk hovered behind them both, apparently packed and ready to go. Walpurga turned,

"Come along, Sirius."

"No." He said, quietly, but very firmly. Remus wanted to tell him to *shut up*, couldn't he see how much trouble he was in?! But Sirius was clenching his fists, looking at his mother, "I want to stay here, with the Potters. You can't make me--"

"*SILENCIO!*" Walpurga spun around, jabbing her wand at Sirius. He stopped speaking at once – though not voluntarily. He opened and closed his mouth a few times, and nothing came out. She had stolen his voice.

"Walpurga, really!" Mr Potter gasped, as Mrs Potter let out a small shriek and knelt beside Sirius,

wrapping her arms around him protectively. "He's just a boy!"

"He is my son." Walpurga purred, looking daggers at Mrs Potter, "And he is heir to the finest house in Britain. He will learn his place. Come, Sirius."

Sirius looked completely defeated, his mouth a straight line of resignation. He hugged Mrs Potter back, then stepped away from her. He gave James and Remus a small wave, before following his mother out of the door.

The four of them stood in silence after the front door slammed. Remus wondered if James felt as ashamed as he did – ought they to have stood up for their friend in some way? What would happen to him now? Mr Potter looked furious.

"Using a silencing charm on her own son! On an underage wizard! It's morally reprehensible!"

"She does worse than that." James said, quietly. Remus nodded, in agreement, feeling as though someone had taken his own power of speech.

"We'll have to make the house unplotable, Fleamont," Mrs Potter said, suddenly, "Make it so we can't be found – you said you were considering it, after the last election. I don't want that dreadful woman in my house ever again."

Mr Potter nodded, darkly.

"I'll look into it in the new year. Alastor Moody owes me a favour."

"Bedtime, boys." Mrs Potter said, her voice trembling. "Try not to worry too much." She hugged James fiercely, kissing him on each cheek. Remus tried to dodge her, but she grabbed him too, pulling him into a tight embrace. She smelled like orange and clove.

* * *

"Psst. Remus."

Remus had just finished brushing his teeth and was making his way down the hall to his room, when James poked his head out and ushered him into his own bedroom. They knelt on the bed together. James withdrew a note from his pyjama pocket, "Regulus sent this,"

"What does it say?" Remus asked quickly, before James could give it to him to read.

"Oh, um, it says 'Sirius is home, do not try to contact him.'"

"That's all?"

"That's all." James nodded, grimly.

"Nice of Regulus," Remus remarked, looking down at the note which was obviously very hastily scribbled down. "Thought they hated each other."

"Yeah, well they're still brothers, aren't they?" James replied, shrugging, "Family ties and all that."

"Do you think he'll be ok?"

"I don't know." James chewed his lip. "I never got to give him his present. He said he never gets anything christmassy from his lot, just family heirlooms and stuff."

"I had a go at him the other day." Remus sighed, dolefully, "About... y'know, my furry little problem."

James chuckled,

"Don't worry about it. You two are always having a go at each other about *something*. Just your personalities."

"Oh. D'you think?" Remus was a bit miffed by that observation – Sirius snapped at Peter far more often, surely. James grinned,

"I told you, don't worry about it. Black loves an argument."

Christmas morning was a subdued affair, though the Potters were keen to make it cheerful, if only for Remus. He was embarrassed to find a bulging stocking at the foot of his bed when he woke up, and resolved to correct this next year somehow.

There were the customary socks and underpants from Matron, plus a tin of shortbread. Some chocolate frogs from Peter and a big book of advanced charms from Sirius. James had bought him a book too – *Conjurers Cartography: A guide to magical mapmaking*. Mr and Mrs Potter, however, had gone above and beyond. Under the tree he found more sweets, practical jokes, a beautiful set of quills – which he tried to give back ("we got the same for James and Sirius, dear, don't be silly,"), and a brand new pair of pyjamas.

The Potters' extended family began arriving for Christmas Lunch at about midday, as well as the Pettigrews, who brought with them Peter's elder sister, Philomena, and her muggle boyfriend she'd brought back from University. Remus was introduced to everyone as a friend of James', and generally ignored, except for by one tiny and ancient wizard who was already red nosed and merry from all of the drinks Gully was passing around,

"Lupin, you say? Not *Lyall* Lupin's boy?"

Remus gaped, unable to answer. He'd only heard his father's name spoken once or twice.

"Um... yes." He said, finally, blushing hard.

"Is he here?!" The wizard grinned, looking around, "Excellent fellow, haven't seen him in years."

"Er... he's dead." Remus replied, with an apologetic shrug.

"Damn shame!" The wizard cried, spilling some of his drink, "Fine dueller; taught me everything I know about boggarts. Temper did tend to get him into trouble though – I told him not to mess about with that Greyback chap – bloody werewolves, ought to exterminate the lot of them!"

Remus blinked. James looked at him, curiously. Fortunately, Mr Potter intervened,

"Darius? Have another drink, old man, leave the young people to their games, eh?"

Remus swallowed hard and returned to the gobstones tournament as if nothing had happened.

Second Year: Sirius Returns

Chapter Summary

This chapter is kind of a downer - don't read it if you're already feeling a bit blue!

Saturday 6th January 1973

Peter, James and Remus arrived promptly at King's Cross to return to Hogwarts on the Saturday before term began. They all peered about looking for their fourth, but Sirius was not there – and nor was Regulus. As the train pulled out of the platform, James went in search of someone to ask. He returned with his hands over his nose, where a large boil was beginning to form.

“Narcissa said it's none of my business.” He explained, sitting down heavily.

“Maybe they're using the floo network,” Peter guessed, “Maybe his mum didn't trust him to get on the train with us.”

“Maybe.” James stared out of the window, rubbing his sore nose. Remus had never seen him so unhappy. James had been missing Sirius more than any of them, and had been so excited at the prospect of seeing him once they got to London. Remus and Peter tried their hardest to cheer him up, but it was as if he was missing his right arm.

Before leaving, Mr and Mrs Potter said that they would see what they could do about having Remus to stay with them over the summer, too, and he thanked them profusely. It wasn't likely, though, so he didn't get his hopes up. Instead he just tried to be grateful that he was returning to school for a few more months with his friends. Most of them, anyway.

Sirius was nowhere to be found at dinner that evening, nor did he appear by the time they were getting ready for bed. James and Remus had brought his Christmas presents back for him, and piled them on top of his pillow, still wrapped in bright shiny paper and ribbon. Three of the packages were from Andromeda, and Remus knew they were albums. Sirius had asked for anything and everything by David Bowie.

Sunday 7th January 1973

On Sunday morning, the bed was still empty, and the three marauders sat around trying to distract themselves with homework. Remus had finished his and took the opportunity to get started on his Christmas books, now that he could invoke his reading spell once more. James took to pacing the room, went to ask McGonagall where Sirius was (she didn't know) and even tried Narcissa a second time (she cursed him again). Finally, he went outside to do a few laps of the quidditch pitch on his broom.

Peter went too, with a box of biscuits to nibble on while he watched. Remus stayed indoors where it was warm; reading, or at least pretending to. Now that he was finally alone, he began thinking about the things Mr Potter's friend Darius had said about his father, turning the new information over in his mind like a coin. His father was good at duelling – he'd heard that before. Lyall Lupin had obviously had a temper too – this was a new piece of intelligence, and an odd thing to know, after so long not really knowing anything. For the first time, Remus considered that his bouts of

rage might not have anything to do with his condition. And who was Greyback? The name alone made him feel hot and uncomfortable. He wished more than anything that James and Peter hadn't been there to hear it all.

Remus sat by the window in Gryffindor tower, his book slack in his lap, staring into space and trying to make sense of a puzzle he didn't have all the pieces to. Occasionally he glanced out of the window to catch sight of James acting even more recklessly than usual.

"What the hell is he playing at?!" A voice squeaked over Remus's shoulder. It was Lily Evans. She was sipping a mug of tea, staring at James on his broom.

"Nervous energy," Remus shrugged, not turning back to look at her. The light from the window would cast his face into sharp relief, and his scar – while no longer red and angry – was still very noticeable.

"James Potter, nervous?!" Lily scoffed, "I had no idea he was capable of such complex emotions."

"Oi," Remus objected, still looking out of the window, "It's not been a great Christmas for him, ok?"

"Ok, ok, I'm sorry, I know he's your friend." She always said that right after she insulted one of the marauders. "How was your Christmas?"

"Great, thanks. You?"

"Brilliant," he could hear the grin in her voice, "Mum and Dad finally let me get an owl."

"Oh, t' rific."

"What about you?"

"Got some books."

"From your... um, from the people you live with?"

He finally looked at her, even more irritated. Why wouldn't she just get lost?

"No, from my friends."

"Oh... of course, yeah." Lily was consciously looking away, at the space just to the left of Remus's head. He sighed, heavily, everyone was going to see it anyway. At least Lily was polite enough not to ask any rude questions.

Remus went upstairs in the end, drew his bed curtains together and settled into *Conjurer's Cartography*. The others eventually came up for bed too, speaking quietly, thinking he was asleep. The exercise had done nothing to calm James down, Remus could hear his rapid heartbeat and smell the cloying scent of anxiety.

It was perhaps an hour after lights out that the door creaked open again.

Sirius had returned – there was no mistaking his familiar footfall. Remus felt a wave of relief wash over him, a knot in his stomach that he hadn't realised was there beginning to uncoil. James and Peter slept on as Sirius tried to keep his movements quiet, creeping into the room and over to his bed, quickly climbing in and drawing the curtains. Remus lay still, listening to Sirius lying still too. There was something different in his breathing. Eventually curiosity got the better of him and he

got out of bed.

Not wanting to intrude, Remus trod as close to Sirius's curtains as he dared and whispered,

"Sirius?"

"James?" He replied, eagerly,

"Remus."

"Oh..." there was a moment's awkward silence. "...I just want to sleep, Lupin. Speak tomorrow, ok?"

"Ok." Remus padded back to his own bed and closed his eyes, feeling no less concerned.

* * *

Monday 8th January 1973

The next morning Sirius had already left before any of them woke up. His presents, still unopened, had been pushed to the end of the bed. His trunk had arrived at some point, and his broom was back on its shelf. James saved him a seat at breakfast, but he never turned up, and they didn't see him at all until their first lesson.

"He wouldn't miss McGonagall," James said confidently, as they pressed towards the classroom, "He loves Transfiguration."

When they entered the room, however, they were all in for a shock. There was another boy sitting in Sirius's seat. He was smallish and hunched over, with pale, pointed features and big blue eyes. His hair was shorn close to his scalp in the same way that Matron shaved Remus's head every summer. It looked darker than Remus's, though.

"Who's that?!" Peter whispered, a little bit too loudly. The boy turned to look at them.

"Sirius!" James gaped.

Sirius coloured slightly, and looked straight ahead as if he hadn't seen them at all. James slid into the seat beside him,

"What happened? Where have you been? What did she *do* to you?!"

Sirius shook his head,

"Later," he murmured.

The classroom had filled up now, and everyone seemed to be whispering behind their backs. Remus couldn't blame them – he couldn't stop staring either. It wasn't just the lack of hair – although that was incredibly disconcerting; Sirius just wasn't *Sirius* without his hair – he also had dark shadows under his eyes, and there was not a trace of humour on his lips.

"All right, settle down, please!" McGonagall entered the room. She glanced at Sirius. Her eyes widened for a millisecond as she recognised him, but she said nothing, addressing the class; "Your end of year exams begin in three months, let's see who's been paying attention..."

McGonagall didn't call on Sirius once to answer a question, though it was usually the only way she could get him to pay attention. Nor did she bother any of the other marauders, who spent the entire

lesson shooting worried looks at their friend. When Transfiguration ended, they packed up their things and followed Sirius hurriedly out of the door,

“What happened?!” James asked, trying to keep up with Black’s brisk clip.

“I said later,” Sirius returned, “Wait until break, ok?”

“But you – what did she...?”

“I’m fine.”

The next lesson, History of Magic, was agony. James was beside himself and even resorted to passing notes to Sirius – who steadfastly ignored them. He sat stiffly, back straight, eyes on the board. For the first time in two years, Remus saw him actually reading his history text in class. Something was very wrong indeed.

They couldn’t get out of History fast enough – James grabbed Sirius’s arm and practically marched him outside to the nearest courtyard, where they chased away a group of first year girls who were doing handstands against a wall, skirts tucked into their knickers. It was icy cold out, though no snow had fallen yet, the sky was paper white and a storm was on its way. Once the coast was clear, James stared Sirius down, eyes full of feeling, deep creases in his brow.

“What *happened*?!”

Sirius sighed heavily.

“What’s it look like?” He gestured at his head. Remus had the peculiar feeling that neither of them cared he and Peter were there – that this was between the two of them, like their nightly chats.

“Your mum did that?”

“Well I didn’t do it myself, did I?!” He snapped, angrily. James didn’t react, just kept looking at his friend. That was James’s secret, Remus realised, suddenly, he was always patient and he never took anything personally. How else could you be best friends with someone like Sirius Black? Sirius was now rooting in his bag and pulled out his red Gryffindor hat, which had so far never been worn. He crammed it over his shorn head, “Bloody freezing.” He muttered, “Dunno how you cope, Lupin.”

Remus shrugged and smiled, pleased to be acknowledged. Sirius leaned heavily against the wall, looking at his feet.

“They let me come back,” he said, quietly, “They almost didn’t – one wrong move and they’ve promised to send me to Durmstrang.”

James and Peter gasped, Remus made a mental note to ask about it later. Sirius continued,

“Didn’t get my voice back until Christmas dinner. Had to play my part for that; everyone was there, all of the sacred twenty-eight – except the Weasley’s, obviously. Lucius Malfoy really bloody hates me now, but he had to be really nice to me and Reg – slimy creep. Got away with wearing my Gryffindor tie until mum noticed and vanished it. Then I... I um... I may have set off a few dung bombs during the fourth course...”

Peter, Remus and James all winced, collectively.

“That’s why... the hair...?” James asked again tentatively. Sirius looked up,

“She said seeing as the usual punishments weren’t having any effect she’d try something different... I tried to get Pomfrey to grow it back for me, but the old bitch said she wasn’t a beautician. Thought I’d done it myself by accident or something.”

“You could tell her—“ Remus started, feeling the need to defend the nurse. Sirius shook his head,

“Not worth it.”

“Regulus?” James asked, suddenly, “Is he back too? He sent us a note to let us know you got home, but we never heard anything else.”

Sirius nodded,

“Yeah, he’s back. Kept *his* hair, obviously. Dad sorted out a portkey into Hogsmeade. He’s still... y’know, a bit of a tosser, but... he didn’t choose to be a Black either. He just plays the game better than I do.” He looked past them all, his eyes wide and desperate. Remus felt an awful ache in his chest. “I just wish...” Sirius said. But nothing more. The bell rang, and they had to get back to their lessons.

Second Year: Gryffindor vs. Slytherin

Everyone in the school knew about Sirius's dramatic new look by the end of their first day back. James and Peter took to walking either side of him through the corridors, like body guards, shooting glares at anyone who dared snigger or whisper as they passed.

"It doesn't look that bad," James assured him, watching Sirius stare at himself in the mirror. They were hiding in the empty second floor girls' loo's during lunch to avoid any more staring.

James was lying, Remus thought to himself, and Sirius probably knew it. It looked *really* bad – he seemed so much smaller. Without the dark hair framing Sirius's face his eyes appeared larger than ever, making him look young and anxious. The high cheekbones and sharp eyebrows stood out more than ever, giving him a mean, gaunt sort of look. It was no wonder everyone stared – in fact, barely anyone glanced at Remus's newly scarred face because of the distraction. Still, Remus thought, glumly – hair grew back.

Sirius rubbed his head, still watching his reflection. Peter laughed nervously,

"You look like Lupin."

James nodded, eyes darting between the two of them.

"Yeah, you do a bit."

Sirius looked at Remus, and for the first time since Christmas Eve, Remus saw him smile. That Sirius Black smile – nothing could ever ruin that.

"Oh yeah, I think I see it," Sirius said, still rubbing his head. He reached out and pulled Remus into the mirror's frame, so that they stood side by side, staring at each other. "We could be brothers."

Remus laughed too, despite himself.

Sirius's real brother was waiting outside Gryffindor common room later that evening. He was sitting on the floor with his knees drawn up, staring into space. His hair was still long enough to touch his shoulders. His friend, Barty Crouch was leaning against the opposite wall, looking bored. He had made a paper aeroplane and was directing it lazily up and down the hallway with his wand. Crouch and Regulus were as inseparable as James and Sirius; Barty was fair haired and weedy, with a mean streak longer than Snape's – Remus already recognised him by his cruel barking laugh alone.

Regulus stood up smoothly as the marauders approached. Remus felt inside his pocket for his wand, just in case.

"There you are." The younger boy said, a tremor of nervousness in his otherwise arrogant tone. His eyes kept flicking towards James. Barty's paper plane began circling them all.

"What d'you want?" Sirius asked.

"Just seeing if you're... seeing how you are."

"No different from last night." Sirius shrugged.

"I didn't see you at dinner."

“Wasn’t at dinner.” Sirius replied, unhelpfully. They’d sent Peter down to the kitchens to pinch some sandwiches and sat in one of Remus’s hidden alcoves to eat. Remus was quite enjoying this game – avoiding the rest of the students, even the Gryffindor’s. Usually James and Sirius would do everything in their power to be noticed, Remus much preferred flying under the radar.

“Can I talk to you?” Regulus addressed his older brother.

Sirius spread his arms, as if giving Regulus the floor. Regulus rolled his eyes, irritated. He didn’t quite have the same mouth as Sirius, Remus noticed. He had a weaker jaw, smaller lips. “I mean *alone*,” he said, shooting looks at James, Peter and Remus.

"No." Sirius said, simply. Regulus sighed. He clearly knew Sirius too well to try and argue.

Barty Crouch's paper plane began spinning faster over their heads. Peter was watching it's progress anxiously.

"Fine." Regulus said, folding his arms. "I just wanted to let you know that mother and father asked me and Narcissa to watch you. And report back to them."

Sirius made a noise of disgust. Regulus continued, not dropping his gaze, "And we're not going to. We're both staying out of it, ok?"

"How noble of you." Sirius replied. James grinned. Regulus rolled his eyes again.

"I'm telling you I'm *not your enemy*, idiot. Nor is Narcissa. You can do whatever you like, that's between you and our parents."

"Good."

"Good."

The two brothers continued to stare each other down. If it had been James, he'd have broken into a smile, slapped Sirius on the shoulder and all would be forgotten. But Regulus was clearly just as pig-headed as Sirius, and couldn't tell when to end a fight.

"Ow!" Peter let out a yelp like a whipped puppy, crouching down suddenly. Barty Crouch had obviously grown bored of the family drama and had decided to dive bomb the smallest of the marauders with his sharp paper plane. Crouch was giggling meanly as the plane backed up and prepared for it's second attack, when James pulled out his own wand,

"*Incendio*." He said, lazily, flicking his wrist in Crouch's direction. The plane, wings now alight, went soaring towards the first year boy with frightening speed. Crouch let out a cry of anguish, covering his face with his arms as the flaming projectile flew straight for him – only to fizzle out mid-air, crumbling in a pile of ash and cinders inches from Crouch's nose.

"Let's go." Regulus muttered to his friend, who had gone pale and was staring at James warily. They both set off back towards the dungeons. “Narcissa said to tell you good luck for Saturday, Potter.” Regulus threw over his shoulder as they turned a corner.

James ignored him, following Sirius through the portrait hole. Once they were all in the common room Remus asked,

“What’s Saturday?”

“Quidditch match. Gryffindor v Slytherin.” James replied, promptly.

Ah. Remus was no good at keeping up with the quidditch schedule – he only went to Gryffindor matches, and the last one had fallen on the day after a full moon, so he'd missed it anyway. He tended to tune out when the others started talking about tactics and league tables, burying his nose deeper in his book.

"I hope you thrash 'em, mate." Sirius growled, throwing himself into the nearest armchair.

"Plan to." James said, jovially, sitting on the arm of the chair. "S'long as she doesn't get the snitch too early – and Marlene's the best beater we've had in years, so--"

James stopped short, realising what he'd said. He looked at Sirius. Sirius groaned and stood up.

"I'm going to bed." He said.

* * *

Saturday 13th January 1973

It had snowed overnight. If Hogwarts had been any normal school, Remus thought to himself grumpily, they would have called off the stupid match. But no; instead Gryffindor common room was buzzing with excitement, with talk of how these were 'perfect flying conditions'. Peter and Remus spent half the morning trying to cast long-lasting warming spells on James's kit. Sirius had done one of his early morning vanishing acts, and was nowhere to be seen.

Adil Deshmakh, the Gryffindor team captain, made the team eat together at breakfast, rather than with their friends. They all sat there looking pale and tired, eating uniform bowls of porridge and fruit (on Deshmakh's orders). James was the only one in a good mood – even though they hadn't got the warming spell to work.

"Where's Sirius?" Lily yawned, as she took a seat next to Remus, biting into a slice of heavily buttered toast.

"Dunno," Remus yawned back, hugging his hot cup of tea as if his life depended on it.

"Sulking somewhere, probably." Peter said, bitterly. Remus gave him a sharp look. "What?!" The blond haired boy frowned, indignantly. "He calls *me* whiny all the time."

"He'll be here." Remus said, ignoring Peter. "He wants to see us destroy the Slytherins."

Even Lily grinned at this – despite her usual pleas for inter-house unity, today she was decked out in red and gold from head to toe, just like everyone else. After breakfast they walked out to the quidditch pitch together. The Gryffindor quarter of the pitch was bedecked with red and gold flags and streamers, plus four large banners displaying the golden Gryffindor lion. Thankfully someone had also cleared the snow from the benches.

Lily and Peter wanted to get the best seats at the very top of the spectator stands, and Remus was already shivering despite wearing two jumpers under his cloak.

"Cold, Remus?" Lily glanced at him, as he tried to blow hot air into his gloved hands.

"Just a bit." He replied, sarcastically, too bad tempered to be polite.

"Here," Lily pulled out her wand and grabbed his wrists, pointing into his palms; "*Calidum Vestimenta*."

At once, a delightful warmth spread through his hands, to the very tips of his frozen fingers.

"How did you do that?!" He asked, "We've been trying all morning!"

"I think it's in the annunciation." Lily shrugged. She quickly applied the same spell to Remus's cloak, then to Peter's.

By the time this was done, the two quidditch teams were gathering on the pitch, which had been cleared enough for them to make a path from their changing rooms at least. They stood in two neat rows – one scarlet, one emerald. Remus could clearly make out a few of the players – James's unmistakable mop of jet black hair, Marlene's fluffy sandy blonde ponytail. He could also see Narcissa Black, on the opposing team; tall and willowy, her platinum hair woven into two neat braids which reached halfway down her back.

Still no Sirius,

"Of course," Peter was blathering to Lily, "We don't actually need to win this one, we just need to keep our points up – as long as we finish with at least six goals then we stay at the top of the league. Black's a brilliant seeker, but Slytherin overall are pretty poor. Especially when you look at James, having him's like having three chasers in one."

Lily was nodding along politely – people so seldom listened to Peter when it came to sport. Remus certainly didn't. He'd attempted to read Sirius' dog-eared copy of *Quidditch through the Ages*, but nothing in it could help him make sense of the ridiculous points system.

Madam Hooch blew her whistle below them, and the players mounted their brooms, squatting ready for kick off.

Still no Sirius.

Remus craned his neck, looking around the stands – but even with his excellent eyesight, he couldn't spot his friend anywhere. Surely Peter wasn't right – he couldn't be off sulking somewhere? They'd thought he was over his rejection from the quidditch team – he'd been at every match that year to support James. Just because this particular match was against Slytherin...

Madam Hooch blew her whistle again and released the snitch. The players shot into the air like red and green cannonballs.

Still no Sirius.

Peter and Lily were on their feet cheering with everyone else, so Remus got up too and attempted to look involved in the game. James had possession of the quaffle within seconds of being in the air, and had it through the hoop in under a minute. The red crowds exploded with triumph, but were quickly overshadowed by a deafening noise like a thunderclap,

"Rrrrrroooooaaaaar!"

"What was that?!" Lily stared about, wide eyed, along with everyone else. Even the players on the pitch looked startled. Remus looked up and saw that the lions in the Gryffindor banners above them appeared to have come to life, and were now prowling back and forth across the red material, growling and tossing their heads restlessly.

"Is that normal?" He asked, pointing. Lily and Peter shook their heads, speechless, as the enormous lions roared above them.

Remus smiled, suddenly. He recognised that magic; playful and a bit scary. "Look!" He pointed again.

At the bottom of the spectator's stands, nearest the ground, a young Gryffindor in bright red robes was also stalking back and forth, waving his wand like a conductor's baton. It was undoubtedly Sirius – who else had that over-confident strut? – but he was no longer bald, and had instead donned an enormous golden wig, like a lion's mane. Remus thought he could even see a gold tail dragging behind from under his robes.

Once everyone had seen him, the crowds laughed – even Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. But Slytherin did not – the green coloured portion of the crowd merely glared at the garish show of house pride.

James was clearly not distracted by the new mascots, but instead encouraged by them – which must have been Sirius's intention. He scored at least three more goals – resulting in three more ear-splitting roars – while the Slytherins struggled to recover from the surprise.

"We are Gryffindor!" Sirius was chanting, his voice magically amplified,

"Mighty Mighty Gryffindor!" The crowd screamed back.

Once he got used to all of the noise, Remus began to enjoy a quidditch game for the first time. James was like a red blur on the pitch, darting this way and that; though the other chasers were very good too, managing to keep up with his complicated formations and passes. Marlene, bat in hand, was doing a stunning job of not only protecting the chasers and seeker, but aiming bludgers at the other team – Narcissa in particular.

Narcissa Black, however, was in her own league. She had an elegant, smooth flying style that Remus recognised from Sirius's attempts to teach him formal flying. She was quick and always moving, like water. The Gryffindor seeker was following her movements, hoping she would lead him to the snitch, but she kept dodging and making false turns to confuse him; twice sending him directly into the path of a bludger. She wasn't showy like James – she was efficient and ruthless.

Gryffindor had a one hundred point lead when Narcissa finally saw the snitch – Remus noticed the moment she caught sight of it. Her posture changed; she didn't look away even once. She hovered for a few moments, glancing behind her to see where the Gryffindor seeker was. He was hanging back, unsure what she was planning.

At that very moment, Maisy Jackson, one of the Gryffindor chasers, scored another goal, bringing Gryffindor's score up to 130 against Slytherin's 20. The Gryffindors went wild, and Sirius waved his wand even more enthusiastically. The lions not only roared this time, but *leapt* clear through the banners, out into the winter air, where they became strange golden shadows striding across the pitch. The Gryffindor seeker dived to dodge them, clearly terrified, though they vanished just above his head.

"No, you idiot!" Sirius's voice echoed over the cheering.

It was too late – Narcissa had taken advantage of her opponent's distraction and scooped up the snitch. She flew above the crowds, holding it aloft triumphantly. The Slytherin crowd finally burst into applause, sending up green and silver sparks, cheering;

"Black, Black, Black!"

Of course, this was highly confusing, as the Gryffindors were also chanting,

"Black, Black, Black!" As Sirius took his bows before the crowd. James swooped down to land

beside him and ruffled his friend's ridiculous mane, as the crowd now chanted, "Pot-ter! Pot-ter! Pot-ter!"

"Oh well," Peter grinned up at Remus, "We lost, but we're still tied with Ravenclaw in the league table – still going through to the final!"

Remus couldn't care less.

Afterwards they poured onto the pitch to congratulate their team – Remus and Peter both punched Sirius playfully,

"You never told us!"

"We could have helped!"

Sirius just smirked and tossed his glorious golden hair.

"Sirius!" A thin, cold voice broke through the crowd. They all turned. Narcissa was striding towards them, still in her billowing emerald robes, a bright silver medal hanging around her neck that made Remus shrink back behind Peter. Sirius stood to face her. She gave him an unexpected smirk, "Take off that obscene wig." She said sharply.

He complied, rubbing his bare head self-consciously. Narcissa pulled out her wand with one sweeping motion and tapped his head, "*Crescere*."

The marauders, and the crowd of Gryffindor's around them all gasped. Sirius hair began to grow, like black water tumbling from his head, until it was back to its usual length.

"What the?!" Sirius grabbed his head. Narcissa grinned, showing rows of pearly teeth,

"That's for your help in ensuring a Slytherin victory." With that, she turned, silver plaits whipping around, and flounced off towards her own team.

James tugged on Sirius's newly restored tresses.

"I'm never going to understand your bonkers family, mate."

Second Year: Discoveries

After the landmark Gryffindor vs. Slytherin game, it felt as though time was speeding up for Remus. Part of this was down to the balance having been restored to their dorm room. James was once again the hero, Sirius's rebellious streak was back in full flow, Peter was no longer treading on eggshells around either of them, and Remus had no peace and quiet at all – though could hardly complain about it.

As if trying to make up for lost time, James and Sirius tore through the final weeks of winter with a renewed zest for pranks and mischief. They spent half of their time under the invisibility cloak, casting hexes at unsuspecting students in the halls, raiding the kitchens and causing upset in the dining hall. At least three or four nights a week they crept out together with Remus's map to plot the castle – though most of the time they returned with armfuls of sweets from Honeyduke's instead. Peter often tried to tag along, but Remus needed all the sleep he could get.

His January and February full moons were not good. Neither was quite so bad as the December moon that had left him so obviously scarred, but neither were at all pleasant. Madam Pomfrey was relentless in her quest to find a solution – in January she tried vanishing his fingernails (*'only temporarily, you understand, you'll have them back in the morning'*) but it did not stop his claws from growing in once the transformation took hold. Remus was somewhat relieved by this, as she'd had plans to vanish his teeth next.

In February, she tried securing his arms and legs with magical manacles to stop him from hurting himself. She was extremely apologetic about these measures – even more so when she returned in the morning to find that he had dislocated both shoulders breaking free of the shackles. He was too tired to care very much.

While engaging in less pranks than he had the year before, Remus chose to throw himself into his studies. Secretly, Remus hoped to take advantage of Sirius and James's determination *not* to focus on their schoolwork. He wanted to come top in History of Magic again, and knew he had a good chance – not just that; his marks had been getting better and better in Transfiguration, Herbology and Astrology too, and he at least had the chance to be in the top three.

Charms and Potions still belonged to Lily Evans, but he wanted to close the gap between them as much as possible. As such, he finally overcame his fear of the library, and spent almost every free hour he had in there, completing essays and revising. His reading had improved a fair bit – he was still slow if he didn't use the spell, but he found that his constant practice helped him recognise the letters much faster than before.

Lily was often in the library too, and after a few days of nodding politely to each other across the desks, Lily gathered up her things and came to sit next to him. They got along very well together, either reading quietly or querying each other on various points.

Inevitably, Lily was the second person after Sirius to discover Remus's secret.

"Why do you do that?" She asked, looking at him curiously.

"Do what?"

"Every time you open a new book, you put your hand on it and scratch your head with your wand."

"No I don't." Remus put his wand down, guiltily.

“Yes, you do.” Lily said, calmly, a small smile playing on her lips, “You muttered something, too. Was it a spell?”

“Um.”

“Oh go on, tell me – is it something to do with the books? Is it how you figure everything out quicker than me?!”

Remus was so pleased by this compliment that he dropped his guard for once.

“Promise you won’t tell anyone?”

“Promise.”

“It’s to help me read. I’m not... I can’t... um... well I find it harder than everyone else. Reading the normal way.”

“Wow! How does it work?!” Her eyes grew wider, as they always did when she was excited about something. Remus was surprised – she didn’t seem at all interested to hear that he couldn’t read normally.

“Like this,” he showed her. She copied him, but looked disappointed,

“It didn’t work.”

“It’s really hard to do.” He explained, “Took me ages to get it right.”

“Where did you find out about it? That’s really, really advanced stuff!”

“I didn’t – Sirius did. I don’t think it’s written down anywhere, it sounded more like he bunged a few different spells together. Probably why it’s a bit clunky.”

“Really?!” If Lily’s eyes got any wider they were in danger of falling out of her head. “*Iknew* he was cleverer than he acts in lessons! Ooh, that git! Show me again!”

As well as Lily, Remus often found that he was joined by her friends, Mary and Marlene. At first he was unsure about this arrangement – he usually tried to avoid the other girls in his year purely out of instinct. Plus, the two M’s were generally to be found giggling at the back of the class or fawning over some wizard celebrity in the common room. However, he was pleasantly surprised to find that both girls took their studies just as seriously as he did – and in fact that their interest in wizard pop stars was hardly different from Sirius and James’s obsession with their favourite quidditch teams.

Mary was particularly nice to talk to – she was muggleborn and from south London; her accent made Remus feel strangely at home. She was unpretentious and had a broad smile and a loud, infectious laugh. Marlene was slightly quieter, but hysterically funny and able to mimic almost anyone in the school – including the teachers. Her McGonagall was spectacular; Remus actually cried with laughter.

The three girls were exceptionally kind to Remus, and he knew this was mostly because they thought he was ill. He didn’t mind though, because he was learning plenty of interesting things from them. For one, Mary had a spell for covering up blemishes – which didn’t *completely* vanish his scars, but noticeably reduced their appearance. He’d never even thought to look in a beauty magazine for a solution.

They introduced him to various other girly things – Mary had a crush on Sirius, and Marlene on James. Remus thought they were both completely mad and wondered if they'd feel the same way if *they* had to share a bathroom with Potter and Black.

In return, Remus helped them with History of Magic, since he was apparently the only student in the whole school who actually found Professor Binns interesting. Marlene was excellent as Astronomy, and showed him how to plot his constellations using some clever mnemonic devices.

"You're so nice, Remus," Mary said, in her usual blunt manner one evening as they walked back to the common room together, "Marlene and Lily were proper scared of you in first year."

"What?!" Remus almost dropped his books in surprise.

"Mary, don't be so rude!" Marlene hissed.

"You *were* pretty aggressive," Lily explained, "And James started telling everyone you were really rough, and that you were in a gang."

Remus snorted with laughter.

As they entered the common room, he quickly spied Sirius, James and Peter huddled in a corner, pouring over a very large, very thick book. Marlene and Mary burst into fits of giggles when they saw them, and ran upstairs. Lily shared a knowing look with Remus before following them.

The marauders looked up as their friend approached, and Peter very conspicuously covered the book they were reading with some sheets of parchment.

"Alright lads?" Remus said, craning his neck, "What you doing?"

"Nothing!" James said, brightly, "Where've you been?"

"In the library," Sirius stated, before Remus could even open his mouth, "With his *fan club*."

Remus smirked,

"Piss off Black, I know when you're jealous." He had elected not to tell his friends that Marlene and Mary fancied them. Their egos might not be able to handle much more inflating. Anyway, he didn't want to change the topic, "Seriously, what you hiding there?"

All three looked at each other guiltily, and Remus felt a sting of hurt. They were all up to something without him – he ought to have known. He supposed it was only fair – he had refused to take part in any pranks for so long that now they didn't want to include him at all.

"Your birthday!" Peter suddenly burst out. "It's coming up."

"Yeah," Remus scratched his head, thrown, "Next week."

"We're planning a surprise!" Peter said, grinning widely, clearly very pleased with himself. Remus did not miss James's look of annoyance, and he knew at once that Peter was lying. Fine. If they didn't want to tell him.

"Oh, right," He swallowed, forcing a smile, "Well you'd better not be planning to embarrass me like last year."

"Oh no, never!" Sirius grinned, standing up, gathering the book to his chest, title still hidden, "Are we the sort of friends that would want to *embarrass* you, Lupin?"

“Yeah, you are.” Remus nodded, slowly, narrowing his eyes, “No singing. No big parties. Nothing that’s going to—“

“Get you into trouble, *we know*,” James finished, standing up too. “Hey, why don’t we invite your new friends, eh? Do us good to mix with the fairer sex, don’t you think?”

“Right,” Sirius tossed his hair, “More like you want a chance to get Evans on her own.”

“How dare you.” James replied, cheeks slightly pinker than usual.

* * *

“So if you’re *not* in a gang,” Mary mused, a few days later. They were checking each other’s Herbology essays and Mary was the fastest reader so she’d already finished. “Where’d you get all the cuts and bruises?”

“Pet rabbit,” Remus replied, still reading Marlene’s essay, “Vicious temper.”

Lily grinned at him.

“Oh yeah? I thought you lived in a home?”

“I do.” He said, coolly, “We’re allowed pets.” That was somewhat true – there had been goldfish, for a time, until the tank got overturned by one of the older boys in a rage.

“Oh, in a children’s home?” Mary looked up, “Are you muggleborn too?”

“No,” Marlene said, promptly, “‘Lupin’s’ a wizard name – your dad?” She looked at him for confirmation. He nodded, unsettled.

“Yeah, how did you know?”

“I saw the name on a trophy.”

“A... trophy?”

“Yeah. Can’t remember what for, I think it was outside the Ravenclaw common room.”

“Oh, right.” He had never so much as glanced at any of the trophies except for the Quidditch Cup, which James stopped to pay homage to at least once a week. He was suddenly filled with an irrepressible urge to run all the way to the Ravenclaw corridor, and dropped the essay he was reading.

Lily was watching him.

“Go, Remus,” she said softly, taking the parchment from him. The other two girls were looking at him too, somewhat pityingly. They nodded. He practically leapt up.

He wasn’t sure exactly what he’d expected. He could barely read for a few moments; he was so out of breath from sprinting up three flights of stairs. The case was mahogany and glass, regularly polished by Filch – or the house elves, he supposed. It was stuffed full of trophies and awards for a hundred different achievements. *Wizard Chess Champion, Triwizard Tournament Victor, Droobles Best Bubble Gum Blowing Finalist.*

And there it was. A huge, golden statuette depicting a wizard raising his wand in a silly looking stance, as if he was serving a tennis ball. *Lyall Lupin, Hogwarts Duelling Champion, 1946.*

He stared at it for a very long time, reading and re-reading. He tried to think logically. This only confirmed things he already knew. His father was in Ravenclaw – McGonagall had told him that in his first year. He was good at duelling – exceptionally good, apparently. Both Slughorn and drunken old Darius had told him that. Really, all this did was confirm that his father had been at Hogwarts – he had *belonged* at Hogwarts. Had probably touched that very trophy. Remus pressed his fingers against the glass as if he could break through and grasp it.

Second Year: Thirteen

Saturday 10th March 1973

The marauders could not have been happier to discover that Remus's birthday occurred on a Saturday that year. This, in their opinion, opened up the day to all sorts of excitement that would simply not be possible on a weekday.

As the day approached, Remus tried to ignore their teasing and heavy handed hints about what lay in store. He didn't mind what they did, he trusted them well enough – they could be relied upon to make a fool of themselves, but they had so far never made him the butt of the joke. James had been receiving strange lumpy packages bound up in brown paper for the past week and Remus's only hope was that they weren't presents for him – he'd never be able to return the favour.

Remus thought a lot about being thirteen – specifically being a thirteen-year-old wizard with a furry little problem. The discovery of the Ravenclaw trophy cabinet had done some very strange things to Remus's internal dialogue. He'd always thought he had a pretty good idea of who he was – a care home kid, poor, a bit weedy, angry, bad, scarred, thick when it came to school stuff, but clever enough when it counted. Coming to Hogwarts had wrought some changes, of course – maybe he wasn't *that* thick, even if he was still sure of everything else.

His father had been *really* clever. He was in Ravenclaw, after all. The sorting hat had considered Remus for Ravenclaw too, but changed its mind. That hadn't meant a great deal to him at the time, but now he wondered and wondered about it. What if he'd been sorted into Ravenclaw? Would he know more, now about his father? About who he was?

What if his father had not killed himself? What if he had never been bitten at all? 'What if' was a dangerous game.

As he fell asleep on the night before his birthday, Remus slipped into a dream he had not had in a very long time.

He is lying in a bed in a small, pale blue room. It is summer and the sash window is wide open; curtains billowing. The window is huge – big enough for a grown man to get through. Remus is very small and very frightened.

There is someone in the room with him, and they are going to hurt him. It's a monster – his mother promised they weren't real, but oh! Oh, she's a liar, a horrid liar, because there is a monster, and it's crossing the room now; it's coming towards him and it will eat him up!

"Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?"

He scrunches his eyes shut and ducks under the covers and trembles and sobs,

Then... then there is nothing – nothing solid, nothing real. He is in pain, there is so much blood and so many tears and an awful lot of noise. He just wants to sleep. Another man looms over him, tall and slender and worried.

"Daddy."

"LUMOS MAXIMA!"

Remus started awake with a jolt, nearly crying out. The dorm room had filled with bright, unnatural

light, it sliced through his bed curtains, making him squint. He just had time to wipe the tears from his cheeks before Sirius and James ripped back the heavy drapes, chanting,

“Happy Birthday, Lupin!”

“It’s still dark out, you pricks.” He squinted, rubbing his eyes and sitting up. He tried to will his heart to stop pounding so hard.

“It is *precisely* one minute past midnight,” Sirius said, “and therefore officially your thirteenth birthday.”

“Where’s Pete?” Remus climbed out of bed, stepping into the room. They had decorated it haphazardly with streamers which he was sure usually decked out the quidditch pitch on match days, and strings of fairy lights left over from Christmas.

“On a mission.” James said, eyes twinkling. “C’mon, up and dressed.”

“Where are we going?”

“Nowhere,” Sirius replied, breezily, “But you’ll want to be properly attired for when your guests arrive.”

“My guests?!”

“Of course,” Sirius grinned, “We tried to keep it marauders only, but so many people wanted to celebrate with you, see.”

Remus couldn’t tell if Sirius was being sarcastic, so he chose not to respond, instead pulling on a pair of jeans and a long-sleeved t-shirt that looked clean enough. By the time he had dressed, there was a sharp rap at the door,

“Come in!” James boomed, cheerfully. Sirius saw Remus’s wince and explained,

“It’s ok, we put a silencing spell on the room.”

Remus frowned,

“So... whoever’s on the other side of that door can’t actually hear us?”

James clapped his hand to his forehead,

“We are complete idiots.” He groaned at Sirius, pulling open the door.

Peter stood outside, looking very pleased and very pink, surrounded by Lily, Marlene and Mary. Remus gaped as they entered the room, all smiling widely and clearly thrilled that they had surprised him. They were all clutching cards and small packages too.

“I didn’t think girls were allowed in here?”

“The lovely Mary tested it for us last week – nothing bad seems to happen,” James explained.

“One day you’ll all read *Hogwarts: A History*, and I can finally rest.” Sirius sighed, shaking his head tragically.

James had begun pulling out packages from under his bed, ripping them open. It seemed they had raided Honeyduke’s again – mountains of sweets were unearthed; Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour

Beans, Chocolate Frogs, Fizzing Whizzbees, Droobles Best Blowing Gum, sherbet lemons, cauldron cakes – not to mention the haul Peter had brought up from the kitchen; ham sandwiches, egg mayonnaise, coronation chicken, cheese and pickle, packets of Remus’s favourite flavour crisps– salt and vinegar – scotch eggs, sausage rolls, pork pies, cheese and pineapple sticks, plus some perfunctory fruit.

Sirius, meanwhile, was laying blankets over the floorboards and scattering a few plush velvet cushions,

“Lupin,” he said with a wide smile, “Welcome to your midnight feast!”

“Happy birthday, Remus!” The girls chanted, as one.

They all sat down together, and Sirius settled a record onto his player – he’d eventually opened his gifts from Andromeda – as requested, he received two Bowie albums: *Hunky Dory* and *The Man Who Sold the World*.

“Sit next to me, Sirius,” Mary said, quickly, earning a reproachful look from Marlene. Sirius shrugged and acquiesced, but leaned over to hand Remus a package,

“Open this first!”

It was long and cylindrical, very light and badly wrapped.

“You didn’t have to get me anything.” Remus mumbled, untwisting the ends.

“A poster?” Lily furrowed her brow, watching as Remus unfurled the thick glossy paper. It was a huge, A2 print of David Bowie in black and white, wearing a spangly silver costume and giving a slightly jerky high kick.

“I got Andromeda to send it to me at Christmas,” Sirius grinned, unable to contain himself, “But I enchanted it to move myself!”

“Wow!” Remus smiled back, sincerely, “Thanks! It’s amazing.”

The girls had all got him packets of sweets and cakes – and Lily gave him a book on Potions. He looked at her sceptically and she grinned,

“Can’t keep giving Severus a reason to lord it over you.”

“Please do not mention Snivellus’s name on this most sacred occasion.” James said with mock horror. Lily rolled her eyes and returned to her jam tart, conspicuously ignoring him. James seemed hardly to notice, just cleared his throat and looked at Remus, his dark eyes full of wickedness, “My present is coming later... once we’ve all stuffed ourselves to bursting.”

“Oh Merlin, Potter,” Marlene giggled, “What have you got planned?”

He would not tell.

Remus had to admit that he was enjoying himself – he had hoped that James and Sirius would respect his wishes and keep the celebrations to marauders only, but inviting the girls wasn’t too bad. He knew them all quite well, now, and actually quite enjoyed their company. Mary could give Sirius a run for his money when it came to barefaced cheek and, as Remus had predicted, Marlene’s impressions of the faculty members had the marauders in stitches – Peter even had to go and change his shirt after snorting pumpkin juice down himself.

“Starting to see why Remus’s been abandoning us for you lot.” James said at about one thirty, wiping tears of laughter from the corners of his eyes.

“Yeah, you’re not bad, for girls,” Sirius winked at Mary, who scoffed and gave him a playful shove.

“Yeah, it’s got nothing to do with me wanting to get my homework done.” Remus replied dryly, wondering if he could manage another chocolate frog.

“Oh, how times have changed,” Sirius said, haughtily.

“You’ll all be laughing on the other sides of your faces when Remus beats you all in our exams.” Lily quipped.

“Pah!” James got up, stretching elaborately as if about to perform some great feat, “Exams! We marauders have *higher* concerns. My dear Mr Black, Mr Pettigrew,” he made a sweeping gesture towards the dorm window, “Shall we?”

“By George!” Sirius stood, abruptly, “Is it time?!”

James closed his eyes solemnly and nodded,

“Indeed it is.”

“Then make haste!” Peter cried, standing up too.

The girls shot nervous glances at each other and then Remus, who could only shrug to show them he had no idea. Sirius, Peter and James went to the window, flinging it open. They were fidgeting from excitement, lack of sleep and too much sugar, and kept snickering like naughty children.

“Come on!” Peter beckoned the others, hurriedly, “You’ll want to see!”

James had produced a collection of bright red objects which looked like a cross between space rockets and stick of dynamite. His arms were full, and so were Sirius’s.

“Are those...” Marlene scrunched up her nose, “Not Dr Filibuster’s?!”

James just gave a maniacal smile.

“Oh no!” Lily said, “We’re not supposed to! You’ll wake up the whole castle!”

“Get lost if you don’t like it, Evans,” Sirius snapped, handing a few rockets to Peter, “You promised not to spoil anything.”

“Remus,” Lily turned to him, “Tell them, they’ll listen to you!”

“No they won’t,” Remus replied, “Anyway, I want to see! I’ve never seem wizard fireworks.”

“You’re in for a treat!” Sirius winked.

“How many do you need?!” Mary stared, sounding impressed.

“Thirteen, obviously.”

“You’re all going to get in so much trouble...”

“Oh, stop being such a goody goody, Lil!” Marlene threw her arm around the redhead.

“We won’t let any of you girls get in trouble.” James said, sincerely, his glasses slipping down his nose as he struggled to keep control of his cargo. “Don’t worry.”

“I’m not worried.” Lily folded her arms defiantly. “I just think you’re all being—”

“Ooops!”

BANG

“Peter!”

They all leaned out of the window to see the rocket Peter had dropped tumbling down towards to ground in a torrent of green and gold sparks.

“Sorry...” Peter looked sheepish. Sirius laughed,

“No, great work – now we’ve started we may as well continue, eh?” and he began to hurl his own fireworks out of the window, clear into the night air. James and Peter quickly followed suit and soon enough even Lily had forgotten to be annoyed as they all stared in awe at the spectacular display lighting up the starry sky.

The fireworks went on much longer than muggle ones, some bursting ten or twelve times before fizzling out. They changed colours from red to green to purple to orange, twisting and curling in various shapes, eventually spelling out ‘HAPPY THIRTEENTH BIRTHDAY REMU’.

Sirius sighed, irritated at that,

“Knew it was too many letters.”

As well as the dazzling light display, the fireworks were satisfactorily noisy, so much so that Remus could already hear the other Gryffindor’s in the tower opening their windows to see whether the castle was under attack. He was sure he heard whoever was in the room above theirs mutter,

“Them bloody marauders are at it again.”

Inevitably, someone began hammering at their door, and McGonagall’s shrill voice could be heard on the other side,

“Potter! Black! Don’t think I don’t know you’re behind this, OPEN THIS DOOR!”

“Oh shit!” James grimaced, “Better get under the beds, ladies...”

Once they had all been thoroughly reprimanded, promised two months of detention and letters home to all of their parents, McGonagall (who was a sight to behold in her red tartan nightie) left them and Marlene, Lily and Mary reluctantly returned to their own dormitory. It was two o’clock in the morning by then, and the boys decided it was finally time for bed.

“Happy birthday, Remus,” Peter called out, followed by a loud yawn.

Remus smiled to himself in the dark, his cheeks almost aching.

“Yeah,” Sirius yawned back, “Happy birthday, Remu.”

Second Year: What's in a Name?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Monday 19th March 1973

“I have a spot of good news,” Madam Pomfrey smiled warmly, “I didn’t want to mention it in case we couldn’t sort things out in time – but you’ll be seeing me over the summer.”

For a moment, Remus dared hope that this meant he was not going back to St Edmund’s, but the medi-witch continued, “Mrs Orwell, your matron at the children’s home, has kindly permitted me to apparate onto the grounds at dawn following both full moons this summer.” She smiled widely.

Ah well. It was better than nothing. He smiled back weakly,

“Great!” He croaked. His arms and legs felt heavy as lead, he could barely raise his head to drink the potion she was offering him.

It was about four o’clock in the afternoon and Remus had missed his lessons – he’d been asleep most of the day. Sleep was still the only remedy that seemed to really work.

“I told Dumbledore I would do it with or without his permission – I couldn’t live with myself if you arrived here in September in the same state you did last year.”

“I could stay at a wizard’s house this summer, that would be even safer,” Remus tried, “My friend James—“

“I’m sorry, dear,” Madam Pomfrey shook her head, “It’s just not safe enough. The Potters did get in touch, but we need to preserve your anonymity for as long as we can – I know it isn’t much fun for you, but it’s better you stay with muggles.”

Remus closed his eyes and took a deep breath. It would only be two months, and the summer was still ages away. *Stay positive, stay positive.*

A sudden clattering noise at the end of the ward jerked Remus out of his meditative chant. Madam Pomfrey frowned and turned to look around Remus’s bed curtain.

“Mr Pettigrew!” She shouted, “What do you think you are doing?!”

“S-s-sorry Madam Pomfrey – we were just...”

“Pick those bedpans up right now and put them back in the cupboard! And you can wipe that smirk off your face, Mr Black, give him a hand.”

“Hiya, Remu,” James peeked around the curtain, “Sorry about all the noise.”

Remus grinned, trying to sit up.

“S’ok.”

“Lie down!” Madam Pomfrey chastised, “You’ve had three broken bones you silly boy.”

“I’m feeling much better!”

CRASH

“MR PETTIGREW, WHAT DID I SAY?!” Madam Pomfrey disappeared, looking very cross.

James slumped into the chair beside Remus’s bed.

“Ready to go?” He asked, casually. Remus could always count on James not to treat him like an invalid.

“If she’ll let me,” Remus nodded to the curtain Pomfrey had vanished behind. “How was the match?”

“Smashed it,” James nodded enthusiastically, dropping the snitch into Remus’s lap. He ran his fingers through his hair as if to regain that feeling of having just touched down. “Made one of the Ravenclaw beaters cry.”

“How nice.”

“How was... y’know, your night?”

“Fine.” Remus replied dryly, twisting his mouth. They didn’t often talk about the full moons – and Remus was pretty glad about that. He didn’t like the idea of them knowing too much. Pain was a personal thing.

“Three broken bones, did she say?”

“Yeah. All fixed now though, she’s amazing, only takes one spell. Muggles have to wear plaster casts for weeks and weeks.”

“Weird!”

“REMU!” Sirius whipped back the curtain, “You’re ALIVE!” He fell dramatically at the foot of the bed, “I was convinced she was trying to cover something up, the old bat wouldn’t let us come over.”

“Don’t call her that,” Remus replied, irritably, “And don’t call *me* that!”

“But you wanted a nickname,” Sirius said, sounding affronted as he climbed back to his feet. Peter appeared, looking sullen with his hands in his pockets.

“No I didn’t.” Remus frowned, “When did I ever say th—”

“Last year.” Sirius said quickly, “Almost exactly a year ago, you said you wouldn’t mind being called anything as long as it wasn’t Loony Lupin.”

“God, you’ve got a memory like an elephant.” Remus rolled his eyes. “Anyway,” he lowered his voice, in case Madam Pomfrey was lurking nearby, “The whole point of having a nickname was so no one knew who wrote the map. I don’t think ‘Remu’ is going to fool anyone.”

“He’s got a point, there.” James said, wisely, “As much fun as it’s been.”

“Fair enough,” Sirius heaved a sigh, “But can we call you Remu until we come up with something better?”

“No.”

“Boring.” Sirius cast around for something else to say, conspicuously avoiding looking at Remus’s bandages. “So are we getting out of here or shall I settle down for a rousing game of snap?”

“He’s not going anywhere,” Madam Pomfrey bustled in, “I’m keeping Mr Lupin in for observation overnight.”

“No!” Remus protested, “I’m feeling much better!” He always said that – it wasn’t usually true, but he knew he *would* start to feel better eventually, and it didn’t much matter whether he was in the hospital wing or not.

“I’m not being deliberately unkind, Remus,” the nurse sighed, “This is for your health.”

“I’ll go straight to bed!”

“We’ll look after him!” James said, earnestly, standing up. Remus waited to see if that worked, James was good with grown-ups, especially witches. He’d even been known to soften McGonagall once or twice (though that might have been more to do with his quidditch skills).

Madam Pomfrey was unmoved.

“I’m sorry, Mr Potter, but no.”

“Fine.” Peter said, uncharacteristically firmly. “We’ll stay here then.”

“Yeah.” Sirius and James said, as one.

“You’ll miss dinner!” Remus said.

“I’m sure we can arrange something just this once.” Madam Pomfrey said, trying not to smile. “All right, boys – but you’re to keep quiet. And get on with your homework, I’ll not have you using Mr Lupin here as an excuse for not handing anything in.”

With a wave of her wand three more chairs appeared out of thin air, along with a long pinewood desk, complete with inkwells for their quills. Remus opened his mouth to speak, but Madam Pomfrey was apparently psychic – “And no, Remus, no homework for you. Just rest.”

Remus shut his mouth and lay back down. How was he supposed to keep ahead of Sirius and James if the woman wouldn’t let him study?

“Can I read my book?” He asked, meekly.

“As long as it doesn’t strain your eyes.”

She left, and the other three boys dutifully pulled out their homework and began scribbling. Remus craned his neck to try and see what they were working on – he was all up to date with his, but had been doing some extra reading in Charms in an attempt to defeat Lily in their upcoming exams.

“Ah ah ah,” James covered his work with his sleeve, “No looking, Remu, you just rest.”

“Ugh, call me Loony!” Remus groaned, “*Anything* but Remu!”

“But it’s suits you!” Sirius said, over his quill, “Reeeeemuuuuuu.”

“Stop it or I’ll bite you.”

“Reeeeemuuuu.”

“Reeeemuuu!” Peter joined in, all three boys giggling hysterically, but trying not to be heard.

“I hate my name.” Remus covered his face with the book he was reading. It wasn’t fair – *James Potter* was so reassuringly ordinary; *Peter Pettigrew* was perfectly respectable and *Sirius Bloody Black* was the coolest name ever, whichever way you looked at it. “You might as well call me anything you like, I dunno what could be worse.”

“Loony Remu?” James suggested, helpfully. “Remoony?”

Sirius could hardly breathe from laughing now.

“REMOONY!” He snorted, collapsing onto his desk, shoulders shaking.

“Moony is actually quite good.” Peter suddenly said, very soberly.

“Eh?”

“Moony. As a nickname.”

Remus stared at him, unaccustomed to paying very much attention to anything Peter said. He thought about it, rolling the name around in his head. It sounded like Loony, but it was nowhere near as horrible.

“I don’t hate it.” He said, finally.

“I love it.” James said, “Moony. Suits you.”

“Won’t people... y’know, catch on?” He worried, chewing his lip.

“Nah,” Sirius waved a hand, “We’ll tell them it’s after that muggle in The Who.”

“They’re all muggles in The Who.” Remus replied, “But I don’t play the drums.”

“You like hitting things.” Sirius shrugged.

“Thanks.”

“No problem, Remoony.”

* * *

Some hours later, after Madam Pomfrey had brought them all dinner, James had left for quidditch practice and Peter for a detention. Sirius had given up on his homework long ago and was instead attempting to perfect a tentacle arms jinx on himself.

Remus was stalwartly ignoring this behaviour – he knew that Sirius was pronouncing the incantation all wrong, with the emphasis in the wrong place – but he wasn’t going to tell him, because he wasn’t sure exactly *why* Sirius wanted a tentacle arm so badly, and it couldn’t be for any good reason.

Eventually, bored, Sirius leaned back on his chair, feet propped up on Remus’s bed.

“What you reading, anyway?”

“*The Epic of Gilgamesh*.” Remus supplied, turning the page. He was nearly at the end, and his reading spell was waning – if Sirius would just leave him alone for five more minutes...

“What’s it about?”

“It’s yours!” He said, surprised, “I got it off your shelf!”

“Oh, one of the muggle ones? I haven’t read many of them, to be honest. They were my uncle Alphard’s.”

“Right.”

“So?”

“So what, Black?!”

“What’s it about?”

“A man called Gilgamesh.”

“Ok, you have to agree that’s a worse name than Remus Lupin.”

Remus chuckled,

“Yeah, all right. It could always be worse.”

“So tell me about this Goulash bloke.”

“Gilgamesh. He was a king. A long time ago.”

“See, now I’m hooked, that’s how all good stories start.” Sirius cupped his head in his hands, staring at Remus as if he was a professor teaching Sirius’s favourite subject.

“No, you’re just putting off your Astrology essay.”

“Pfft, I’ll copy James’s.” Sirius waved a casual hand, “Tell me more, oh keeper of knowledge. I’ve read to *you* plenty of times.”

Remus sighed, putting down the book. There was no getting out of it when Sirius was in this sort of a mood.

“Gilgamesh was a king.”

“Yes, a long time ago, you’ve established that.”

“Look, shut up or piss off.”

“Ok, ok!” Sirius held up his hands in surrender, “Carry on.”

“So he was a king, but not a good one. He wasn’t fully human – he was two thirds god, so he was stronger than everyone else and his people were frightened of him. He was dangerous. So, his people prayed – um... that’s when you ask the gods for help – and the gods sent another man to help control Gilgamesh.”

“Was he even stronger?”

“No, but he was part animal,”

“So this beast-man killed Gilgamesh?”

“No. They fought each other for a really long time, but Gilgamesh still won. He didn’t kill Enkidu, though – he... he sort of recognised that they were equals. And they become friends – best friends. They have all these adventures together, fighting other monsters and stuff. It’s cool.”

“I want to know more about the beast-man.”

“Enkidu. He was master of the animals, and he was happy living in the wild, but then after he’s sent to control Gilgamesh he can’t ever go back to nature. So he never really belongs.”

“But he had his friend, right?”

“Yeah, but... well I don’t want to spoil the ending for you.”

“S’ok, I hardly ever read muggle stuff.”

“You’re missing so much!” Remus exclaimed, “Well, ok then. Enkidu dies.”

“What?!”

“Yeah, it’s sort of sad, he was my favourite character too.”

“But why?”

“To teach Gilgamesh about death, I think. Before Enkidu he was too arrogant to believe anything could hurt him. But after he loses him, he realises that he’s not the master of everything. No one can control death.”

“That’s a really depressing thought, Moony.”

Remus shrugged. It had all seemed pretty straightforward to him.

Chapter End Notes

If you fancy reading The Epic of Gilgamesh (AND YOU SHOULD, IT'S AWESOME), you can get an English translation at this link:
<http://king-of-heroes.co.uk/the-epic-of-gilgamesh/maureen-gallery-kovacs-translation/>

Second Year: Love & Marriage

Chapter Summary

CW for a homophobic slur/homophobic tone towards the end of the chapter.

Friday 20th April 1972

Still don't know what I was waiting for

And my time was running wild

A million dead end streets - and

Every time I thought I'd got it made

It seemed the taste was not so sweet

So I turned myself to face me

But I've never caught a glimpse

Of how the others must see the faker

I'm much too fast to take that test.

Remus loved *Hunky Dory* more than anything. It was by turns bright and happy – then dark and introspective. He felt that David Bowie must have some super human insight into his soul. Even if he didn't always fully understand the lyrics, he felt as though they somehow made sense.

He hummed the tune to *Changes* quietly under his breath as he walked up and down the dark library shelves, his wand lit for a better look. He really ought to be catching up on Potions – but Lily had offered to help him over the weekend and he'd already been revising Transfiguration all day. It had taken that long to turn an old top hat into a rabbit and back again.

Remus finally found the shelf he was looking for – *The British Wizards Guide to Nuptial Laws 1700 – 1950*. He hoped that would be recent enough. It was huge, and he had to get up on a step ladder to reach it. Stretching, Remus just about had purchase on the dusty old leather cover, and was about to pull it down towards him, when another hand reached up and grabbed his wrist.

Yelping, Remus yanked his hand back and almost toppled off the stool, coming face to face with Narcissa Black.

“Ugh, it's *you*.” She said, distastefully. She was a head taller than him, so they came about level as long as he kept his balance. She did not release his hand, “Give me that.”

“No, I had it first.” He replied, still trying to pull away. She had an iron grip.

“Go away, little boy. What could you possibly want this for?” She gave him a hard shove and he toppled backwards, landing painfully on his backside.

Narcissa smiled down at him, victorious, holding the heavy tome. He scowled,

“What do *you* want it for?”

“That’s none of your business,” she breezed, tossing her pale hair out of her eyes in a manner eerily similar to Sirius. She turned and began to walk away, between the gloomy stacks. Remus scrambled to his feet,

“Wait,” He said, trying to keep his voice down so that Madam Pince didn’t throw him out again, “Oi, Narcissa, wait!” He tugged her robes.

She spun around with furious eyes, her wand raised. Remus instinctively grabbed his own wand just in time. They both stood like statues for a few moments. He knew that she had cursed James and Sirius on several occasions, and that the whole Black family knew all sorts of dark magic. But at the same time, Remus had never cursed a girl before, and it felt wrong.

“I just wanted to know,” he said, carefully, choosing his words, “If it was anything to do with you and Sirius... the engagement thing.”

She lowered her wand, slowly, regarding him with suspicious interest.

“So he’s told you all about that, has he?” She raised an eyebrow – which was still as inky black as her natural hair colour. “Yes, little boy, that’s exactly what I need it for. You don’t think I *want* to be married to that whiny little blood-traitor, do you?”

Remus just shrugged. The truth was, it hadn’t actually occurred to him how Narcissa felt about any of it. He’d been so focussed on helping Sirius that he hadn’t considered whether anyone else might be working on exactly the same problem. Narcissa sighed impatiently,

“Well I don’t. And I’m not expecting my brat of a cousin to come up with a solution any time soon, so here I am.”

She didn’t sound angry anymore, just bitter. Now that he was closer to her, Remus could see that she had dark rings under her eyes.

“I want to find a solution.” He said, tilting his chin up to meet her gaze, wishing he wasn’t shorter than her. “I’ve been trying, anyway.”

“Ha.” Narcissa laughed humourlessly, “A second year?! And what have you come up with, hm?” She tapped her black patent heel on the dark floorboards.

"Well..." Remus swallowed, "Not much – nothing good enough yet. Unless... well, unless *you* were already married."

"I've thought of that." Narcissa snapped, "I'm not of age yet, I can't. I'd have eloped with Lucius the moment they proposed this ridiculous engagement, but I'm not seventeen until October."

"Right," Remus nodded, surprised to hear this, "And... it can't wait, because of the betrothal ceremony this summer, right?"

"Correct." She was looking at him with slightly less venom, now, as if she found the conversation amusing rather than irritating.

"But, I was thinking – what actually *is* the ceremony?" He asked, feeling braver, "What do you and Sirius have to do?"

"Oh, the usual Black family rubbish," she replied, "A banquet, astrological charts, probably a commemorative portrait of the two of us. Mother still has Bella's hanging up in the dining room."

The thought of a portrait depicting thirteen year old Sirius with his sixteen year old cousin was repulsive to Remus. Narcissa didn't sound like she relished the idea either. "This is all his fault, you know." She said, "Acting as if he's some special case. If he had simply followed tradition like the rest of us, toed the line until he was old enough to get out..." She trailed off, her eyes bright with angry tears, which she wiped away quickly, "Anyway, it doesn't matter. I'm marrying Lucius and that's all there is to it. Thank goodness he's stood by me through all of this, anyone else would have walked away."

Remus didn't like to comment. What did he know about relationships? He'd never even seen one close up. They were silent for a few minutes, while Narcissa composed herself. Once she had, she gave a sniff and looked at Remus again, "I shan't curse you." She said, magnanimously, "But I'm warning you – I've had just about enough of people meddling with my future. So just keep your nose out from now on."

With that, she turned and left, leaving Remus with plenty to think about.

* * *

Monday 30th April 1973

"Moony, what are all of these books for?" James asked, as he tripped over a pile Remus had carefully stacked near the dorm entrance – they were useless and he'd been planning to take them back that afternoon.

"Just some research." He replied, not looking up from his current book, "Where've you been?"

"Plotting." Sirius followed James him, stepping over the scattered books which his friend was trying to clear up. Remus raised an eyebrow,

"Plotting? Map or mischief?"

"Bit of both," Sirius grinned, throwing himself onto Remus's bed. He picked up a book,

"*Wizard Wedding Rituals?!'*" He laughed, "Who you marrying, Moony? Not Evans, James'll have to challenge you to a duel."

"I do NOT fancy Evans." James spat, from where he squatted on the floor. "*Magical Marriages.*" He read, picking up the final book and placing it on top of the pile, "Seriously, Remus, what's all this about?"

Remus sighed, putting down the book and rubbing his eyes,

"I'm trying to help you," he kicked Sirius gently with his foot. "Someone's got to get you out of this stupid engagement."

"Oi!" Sirius scowled, "I'm doing everything I can."

"What are you doing?"

"Haven't I had more detentions than anyone else this year? I must get a howler a week. And my lions, don't forget my lions at the quidditch match."

Remus stared at him, dumbfounded.

"How is any of that supposed to help?"

"I'm proving that I'm not the marrying type."

"No offence, mate," James put in, coming to sit on the bed with them, "But I don't think your lot really care that you're not the marrying type."

"Exactly," Remus nodded, "You're the heir. You have to marry another pureblood. And the Black family have a long history of inter marriage, even your parents are cousins."

"Er... how do you know?" Sirius looked uncomfortable.

"I've been reading." Remus gestured at all of the books. "There's loads of stuff in the library on your family. One of the oldest wizarding houses in Britain, traced all the way back to the middle ages, where the family seat was in Inverness in Scotland--"

"I know all of this." Sirius waved a hand.

"Yeah, but did you know that you aren't the first Black who wanted to get out of a marriage?"

"Well obviously Andromeda – though that was more that she *did* want to marry, only Ted was the wrong sort..."

"Not just her – Lyra Black defied the family's wishes in 1901 to marry into the Crabbe family, and Delphinus Black was supposed to marry his niece in 1750 but left her at the altar and married Fidelia Bulstrode. And, your Uncle Alphard never married either, though there's no explanation--"

"Yeah, we're not supposed to talk about him," Sirius replied, edgily, "I've heard mother ranting about him and I'm pretty sure he was a queer."

There was an awkward silence.

"My dad knew Alphard," James said, "Said he was an all right bloke."

"He was always nice to me," Sirius shrugged, "Left me his money and everything, made sure no one else can touch it until I'm of age. Makes my parents furious, you know, that he didn't return all his cash to the family vault, so I have to give him credit for that, even if he was... well, whatever."

Remus's throat was very dry, and he cleared it, wanting to move on,

"So anyway, it just goes to show that you can get out of this sort of thing. Only problem is, I can't find any good details on *how* they all got away."

"Don't bother," Sirius said, gloomily, "Even if you did find out – none of them had my mother to contend with. You know what she's like. She's probably going to make us take the unbreakable vow."

"She wouldn't!" James said, aghast.

"She'd do anything." Sirius nodded.

Remus chewed his lip, thoughtfully. He didn't know what the unbreakable vow was – it sounded like dark magic. From what he'd already read about the House of Black, he knew that the library's restricted section would probably have to be his next stop. He'd have to borrow James's cloak for

that, and go at night. No matter. He refused to be deterred from this. He owed it to Sirius.

Hadn't Remus once told Sirius that his own problem was hopeless, inescapable? And hadn't Sirius worked tirelessly, learnt to perform complicated, NEWT standard magic, just to help him? This was no different. He just had to work harder. Knowing that Narcissa was also working on the problem was strangely comforting. Remus knew from her curses that she must be a very accomplished and clever witch, and there was no doubt in his mind that she usually got her way.

I'm marrying Lucius and that's all there is to it. There had to be something in that. He remembered Flitwick telling them that love - natural, everyday, human love - was one of the most powerful types of magic. While Remus didn't personally feel that anything about Lucius and Narcissa's coupling was natural, exactly, he knew that it was a lot more powerful than family honour. It had to be.

Second Year: Exams

May 1973

Exam season began at the worst possible time for Remus, around mid May, right when the full moon was due. The moon itself fell on a Friday, which meant he was able to attend his Potions test that morning – but he lost the whole weekend to sleep, when he would really have preferred to revise. More than that, the moon had thrown his magic off completely.

He'd thought it was happening less in his second year, but as their exams got closer – whether it was nerves or the lengthening days – Remus found his magic growing stronger, wilder and harder to control. The slightest wand movement caused the most fantastic results, and sometimes he'd barely finished speaking the incantation before light was bursting from its tip, making his fingers tingle with shock.

James had taken to saying '*calm down, Moony!*' at least three or four times a day, as Remus attempted to practice various basic transfigurative spells and charms which inevitably went too far. He'd thought that just doing simple incantations might help him gain some control, but this was apparently not the case, as he smashed the dorm room window a third time attempting to levitate his gobstone set.

"*Reparo.*" Sirius muttered, glancing over the top of his Astronomy revision. The window fixed itself at once. Remus sighed.

"You really need to relax, mate," James grinned, "We don't have any practical exams until next week anyway."

"I'm so behind, though!" Remus grumbled, collecting up his gobstones and putting them back in their box.

"If you're behind then what am I?!" Peter wailed from the floor, where he had five texts spread out in front of him, all different subjects. "I know I'm going to fail Transfiguration, my rabbit hasn't changed at all this year, and I *know* she's going to make us do something really hard."

"At least you're good at Potions." Remus shot back. "And Herbology, I can't ever remember which leaves mean what..."

"You beat me on our last Herbology quiz," James reminded him, "And you've got us all by the bollocks when it comes to History of Magic, I've been copying your homework all year."

"But *you're* best at Transfigur-" Remus started, but was interrupted by a loud thump as Sirius threw his Astronomy book to the floor.

"Will you all shut up?! I'm trying to revise!" He yelled, standing up. "Like a bunch of old women nattering. I'm going to the library." He pulled his satchel over his shoulder and stormed out of the room.

They sat in silence for a little while. Peter, gnawing his lip, looked on the verge of tears. James sighed,

"Ignore him, he's just in a mood because he has to go home soon. Not that I blame him." He added, quickly. "Parents like that, and all."

"S'pose," Remus shrugged, though he didn't think it was a good enough excuse, really. It wasn't as if he, Remus, was much looking forward to the summer holidays either. All right, fine, he didn't have to marry his cousin, or attend weird stuffy banquets – but nor did Sirius have to be locked up in a cell once a month, or hide from much older, rougher boys whose greatest delight was shoving your head in the bogs.

"He's not staying with you again, then, James?" Peter asked, nervously – probably quite looking forward to a Sirius-free summer, as it meant he would have James all to himself.

"Nah," James replied, sounding much less cheerful at the prospect, "He's got an open invite, obviously – you all have," he eyed Remus, "But we don't reckon it'll happen after the fiasco at Christmas. He thinks he'll be locked up completely until the betrothal ceremony."

Remus felt a pang of guilt in his chest. He still hadn't come up with a workable solution to that, and between revision and the full moon he hadn't even thought about it properly in two weeks. Judging by Narcissa's behaviour in the halls – hexing anyone who so much as looked at her sideways – she had not fared much better.

"Well if he keeps acting the way he does he'll lose more than his hair next time," Peter said, primly, sorting through his notes.

"What'd you mean?" James frowned, sitting up, "Saying it's all his fault?!"

"No!" Peter looked alarmed at James's tone, "*No*, I just mean... well, you know the other day he packed all those Gryffindor house banners in his trunk. He wants to put them up in his bedroom to annoy his parents. Stuff like that is exactly what gets him into trouble."

"Nothing wrong with a bit of house pride." James sniffed defensively, though he shot a nervous glance at Sirius's trunk.

Remus didn't get involved. Personally, he agreed with Peter and Narcissa – Sirius was his own worst enemy, a lot of the time. For someone so intelligent and magically gifted, he completely lacked subtlety, or even forethought. If he didn't have to mouth off at every opportunity, then maybe he wouldn't have found himself engaged at the age of thirteen. Remus knew better than anyone the importance of keeping a low profile, especially when you were different from everyone around you.

James, who was more like Sirius than Peter or Remus, wholeheartedly disagreed. In his mind, the most important thing was to always fight back. But if everything was a battle, then inevitably *someone* had to lose. And until he was of age, that was going to be Sirius every time.

* * *

"Excellent, Mr Potter!" McGonagall gushed uncharacteristically, as James transformed his rabbits into a perfect pair of fine red velvet slippers with a fur trim.

Remus took a deep breath, steadying himself for his own attempt. It was a week and a half since the full moon and he was finally back in control, though his nerves still got the better of him sometimes. He watched Sirius lazily wave his wand over his own rabbits, and they too transfigured into a lovely pair of black wool booties.

Peter's slippers still had ears and a tail even after three attempts, and left droppings on the desk. When Remus took his turn, he closed his eyes first, feeling light headed, before finally uttering the incantation.

The slippers were not as neat as James and Sirius's, but they were wearable, and at least no longer had any leporine features, even if they stayed a dull brown colour. At least he knew he had done his very best on the theory paper – in fact on all of his theory papers. He was satisfied that he'd remembered everything he needed to remember when it came to his best subjects, and that he hadn't done too hideously in Potions, Herbology or Astronomy.

At the end of the Transfiguration exam, McGonagall returned all of the rabbits to their original state and sent them hopping back into their hutch at the back of the room ready for the next exam. She then began to hand out sheets of parchment that looked like blank timetables.

"You will be aware," she said, very formally, "that in your third year you may choose a minimum of two additional subjects to take up to ordinary wizarding level. Here are your application sheets. If you will please think very carefully, reviewing each subject's merits, then complete the form and return it to my office no later than the last day of term."

The class began to murmur excitedly, and Remus looked down at his form, and the subjects listed there, with great trepidation.

As they all filed out of the room, Peter immediately began to badger James to find out which subjects he would be taking – so that he could select the exact same ones.

"Muggle Studies." Sirius said, as they headed outside into the summer sunshine, "Definitely going to take Muggle Studies."

Remus rolled his eyes. There was no surprise there – if any subject was going to win the general disapproval of the Black family, then there it was.

"D'you think Evans will take that?" James scratched his chin. Sirius grinned,

"Doubt it, mate, she's muggle born. You could impress her with your knowledge, though."

"Yeah... yeah, maybe..." James looked down, thoughtfully.

"Are you going to take that, then, James?" Peter asked, anxiously, "Do you think it'll be difficult? I s'pose we could just ask Remus for help... are you taking it, Moony?"

"Nah," Remus shook his head, "What's the point? You lot do it, though, then maybe you can stop asking me stuff."

He secretly wished that there was a 'Wizarding Studies' subject he could take, so he didn't have to feel quite so out of his depth all of the time. But, he supposed, that was the arrogance of wizards.

"Divination... that's like fortune telling, right?" James sat down on the grass, throwing off his robes. Sirius followed suit, rolling up his shirt sleeves.

"I think so. Crystal balls and tea leaves."

"Sounds like a right doss. Let's do that."

All three of them scribbled onto their papers. Remus did not. He didn't like the idea of knowing the future – whatever he had coming to him, he was sure it couldn't be good. He tapped his temple with his wand quickly and whispered,

"*Lectiuncula Magna*," beginning to read through his options. "Arithmancy," he murmured, "Is that like arithmetic?"

"Numbers, anyway," Sirius replied, "It's supposed to be really difficult."

"Care of Magical Creatures... dunno about that," James snorted, "Have you seen the teacher? He's got more scars than Moony."

"Oi," Remus kicked his ankle. Care of Magical Creatures had actually sounded quite interesting to him. After all, he sort of *was* a magical creature himself.

"I think I'll do Arithmancy, if you are," Sirius said, still reading his paper.

"Will it really be difficult?" Peter worried.

"We'll help you, Pete, don't worry." James soothed. "Anyway, there are better things about third year than extra homework – Hogsmeade!"

"You go to Honeyduke's three times a week." Remus replied, mulling over the possibility of Ancient Runes.

"Yeah, but Zonko's!"

Remus grinned at him. He was actually pretty excited about the Hogsmeade trips – he'd never been to any of the protected wizarding areas other than Hogwarts, and he was sick of hearing about how great Diagon Alley was. He sighed and lay back, looking up at the clouds. He would think about his third year subjects later, there was no hurry. For now, he wanted to enjoy the end of exams, and revel in the thought that they still had almost a full month before school ended.

"Oi oi, Evans!" James sat up, suddenly.

Remus sighed, inwardly. James had been acting more and more of an idiot where Lily was concerned, ever since the midnight feast.

"I'm not a dog, Potter," her voice echoed across the grounds, "Don't yell at me like one."

"Hi Sirius," Mary's voice now. Remus sat up, blinking.

Marlene gave a shy wave, which he returned.

"All right, MacDonald," Sirius nodded, casually sweeping his hair behind one ear. He'd started doing that whenever there were girls around. Remus hated it.

All three girls had ice creams, which looked like an excellent idea considering the unseasonably warm weather. Lily had even charmed a Chinese fan to follow her around, creating a cool breeze wherever the three girls went.

"Give us a lick, then," James winked at her, lewdly. Marlene turned beetroot red and dissolved into giggles, but Lily remained calm, arching one red eyebrow.

"You do look like you need cooling off. *Aguamente!*"

With that, she aimed her wand at the marauders and sprayed them all with icy cold water. Remus leapt out of the way, but she wasn't trying to get him anyway. James and Sirius got the worst of it, and shouted in dismay as their hair and shirts were drenched. Mary, Marlene and Lily cackled with glee.

"What'd you do that for?" Sirius growled, pulling his dripping hair apart to glare at them, looking like a drowned rat.

"Thought you lot liked practical jokes?" Lily winked at him, before turning away and walking towards the lake.

"Complete nightmare, that one." Sirius groaned, trying a hot air charm on his hair.

"That's my future wife you're taking about," James replied, dreamily, watching her go. His glasses had steamed up comically. "Oh stop being so dramatic, you'll dry out in half an hour in this heat."

"Where'd you think they got the ice cream?" Peter asked, distantly.

Remus smiled, lying back again. Never mind going home, or betrothals or new subjects. For now, everything was just as it should be.

Second Year: The Long Last Day (Part 1)

Friday 29th June 1973

Remus was running late, and there was still so much left to do. As usual, he had slept later than the rest of the marauders, and by the time he woke up, Peter was the only one left, scurrying out of the door with a quick, “Morning Lupin! Good luck!”

Checking the clock, Remus had leapt out of bed and run for the shower in a state of panic. As he combed his hair in the mirror – thinking glumly that this might be the last time, as Matron was sure to shave him bald as soon as he was back at St Edmund’s tomorrow – he ran through the list in his head.

Breakfast first, of course – couldn’t miss that. If he got a move on, then he might just catch James and Peter before they set off on their own missions. It would likely be his only chance to see them, because today, the very last day of term, the usually united marauders would be conspicuously separate until the feast.

After breakfast he would have to run back upstairs to pack – Remus was quite sure that they would have a detention coming their way that evening, and he might not have enough time the next morning before they had to catch the train. Once he’d packed, he needed to return his library books. This filled him with a sense of guilt – he still hadn’t found anything to help Sirius, despite weeks of research. Their only hope now was that the Black cousins would be able to find a way out of the engagement *after* the betrothal ceremony had taken place.

On his way to the library he’d be able to drop off his subject applications form at McGonagall’s office – he’d put that off far too long already. Then, books returned and form handed in, Remus thought he should have ample time to meet Peter outside the greenhouses at eleven o’clock, where he would collect the invisibility cloak.

As long as everything went like clockwork, Remus should then be able to get the umbrellas he needed from the gamekeeper’s shed on the grounds, and smuggle them back to their dorm room. Then it would be about lunch time – Remus was hoping to use that hour to finish reading his book in peace – he’d borrowed it from Sirius and only had a chapter left, so he really wanted that out of the way before they had to go home. Especially as he sincerely doubted that McGonagall would allow him to read during his inevitable detention that evening.

Shortly after lunch, that, the first stage of the marauders end of term plan would come into effect. He would avoid the mayhem and double check he’d packed everything – possibly doing a bit of Sirius’s packing too, because the other boy still hadn’t done it and Remus suspected he was leaving it to the last minute. Then the preparations for the feast would begin – all he had to do was show up early enough to help James and Sirius with the final incantations. This was provided, of course, that none of them got caught before then.

There was a sudden knock at the bathroom door, just as Remus was pulling up his jeans,

“Toast out here for you, Moony,” Sirius’s voice called, “Thought I’d save you some time.”

“Oh, great, cheers!” Remus called back, pulling on his shirt quickly, as if Sirius might see him through the wood.

“Good luck! See you this afternoon!”

“Yeah – you too!”

Remus heard Sirius’s footsteps retreat and disappear down the staircase. Well. At least that was one thing taken care of. He emerged from the steamy bathroom and saw the plate of toast sitting on his trunk. Four slices – Sirius had not been stingy – and each liberally coated with a different spread. Remus grinned and renewed his pledge to help Sirius pack later on.

He spent a leisurely hour munching on the toast and collecting up various belongings which had spread themselves far and wide from his bed to his friends’ shelves, even down into the common room. He took the opportunity to play *Hunky Dory* one last time, saying a fond goodbye to the record player for a few months.

The David Bowie print Sirius had given him for his birthday no longer moved – which Remus was somewhat glad for, because at least that meant he could take it back to St Edmund’s without arousing any suspicion. His trunk didn’t seem to close as easily as it had at the end of last summer, when he’d been on his way to Hogwarts, and he had to rearrange the items several times before everything squashed inside.

Remus brushed his teeth and went to gather his library books, stuffing them into his threadbare satchel. He wondered if Matron might let him have a new school bag – mind you, last time he’d asked for one she’d taken the opportunity to teach him how to sew. ‘A life skill’, she’d said. He didn’t bother telling her that the repairing charm work much better – but even that wasn’t much use any more.

With his list of chosen subjects in hand, he headed down into the common room, where every other Gryffindor seemed to be doing their last-minute packing too. The usually cosy space was in uproar, with shouts pleading for the return of missing books and games, students crawling under tables and lifting sofas hunting for long lost items, groups of tearful seventh year girls hugging everyone goodbye, and owls swooping this way and that.

“Remus!” Mary stopped him on his way out, “You all by yourself?”

“Yep.” He nodded, with a mischievous grin. She grinned back,

“Oooh, what are you lot planning? Me and Marlene were just saying how you’d been quiet for the last few weeks...”

“Ask me no questions and I’ll tell you no lies.” He replied. “Sorry, but I’ve got to return my books ___”

“Lily’s looking for you,” she said quickly.

“Oh, um... I’ll be in the dining hall for lunch. Bit busy until then, tell her sorry!”

With that he hurried through the portrait hall and out into the corridor, which was just as busy with students rushing back and forth, saying their last-minute goodbyes. Peeves, caught up in the excitement had obviously found out where Filch stored the toilet roll and was flinging wads of wet tissue at anyone who got close enough.

Arms over his head, Remus scurried towards McGonagall’s office just as Peeves fired at the door. Remus ducked, just in time, and Peeves flew off laughing maniacally as McGonagall – having heard the very loud ‘SPLAT’ – opened her office door. She peered down at Remus, still squatting and covering his head.

“Mr Lupin.”

“It was Peeves!” He stood up, quickly, “Honestly Professor!”

“I believe you.” She gave a small smile, “Spirits are always high on the last day of term. Have you got something for me?” The old teacher glanced at the parchment he was clutching.

“Oh, yes!” He stuck out his hand.

“Excellent, do come in, Lupin.”

“Er...”

But you could hardly say ‘no’ to McGonagall, or ask her if it could wait until later. He wondered what on earth she wanted – surely Sirius and James hadn’t been caught already? It would be pretty obvious as soon as phase one of the plan was initiated, and he’d heard nothing...

“Sit down, Mr Lupin. Tea?”

“Um... yeah, ok.” He sat, uneasily. McGonagall waved her wand, and the little tartan teapot on her desk began to pour its contents into two matching cups.

“Help yourself to milk,” the professor said, absentmindedly, as she scanned the piece of parchment he’d given her. “Divination,” she said, “Muggle Studies and Arithmancy.”

He didn’t say anything. She looked up, finally, surveying him over the tops of her square spectacles. “These are the same subjects Mr Potter and Mr Black have chosen, if I’m not much mistaken? Mr Pettigrew too, hm?”

Remus just nodded. Actually, Peter was only taking Divination and Muggle Studies – he had found out that you only needed to select a minimum of two new subjects and had decided not to push himself any further than necessary. Remus would rather die than take on less work than James or Sirius.

“I’m interested to know what prompted you to select Muggle Studies, in particular? Considering a future in the Muggle Liaisons office, perhaps?”

“Er...” Remus stammered. He had no idea what the Muggle Liaisons office was, but it didn’t sound very interesting.

“I would have thought you’d have sufficient knowledge of the Muggle World, having spent so much of your life in it.”

“Yeah, but... well...”

“There’s no need for you to take subjects simply because your friends are, Mr Lupin.” Professor McGonagall said, more kindly than he’d expected. “You’ll still be taking the same core classes, after all.”

Remus shrugged. He hadn’t known what else to do. Really, all the subjects had interested him – ok, perhaps not Muggle Studies, she was right there – but in the end, he hadn’t much liked the idea of missing out on lessons with the other marauders.

“One of the most wonderful things about school, Mr Lupin,” McGonagall began, tactfully, “Is the friends we make – connections and relationships that last a lifetime. I know you have made some very dear friends at Hogwarts.”

Remus fought a grimace. Did she have to make it sound so girly?! She cleared her throat, clearly amused by his reaction, “Some very dear friends. But school is also the place to challenge ourselves, to test our mettle. Do you understand?”

He nodded, blankly. She sighed, sipping her tea.

“Your exam results were excellent this year, Remus.”

He straightened up a little, at that. He was pretty chuffed with the results himself. He hadn’t beat James at Transfiguration, or Snape and Lily at Potions, but in everything else he had some of the highest marks in his class.

“As such,” McGonagall continued, “I have no concerns in permitting you to study Arithmancy – which, I must tell you, is one of the most challenging courses we offer at Hogwarts. But I would question whether Muggle Studies is a suitable use of your time going forward. You might find it very dull, I’m afraid. Have you considered, for example, Ancient Runes?”

Remus twisted his hands in his lap. It *had* sounded quite interesting. But he’d spent so much time struggling to read English, and catching up with the rest of the students, that he’d balked at the idea of learning another language. McGonagall seemed to understand his concerns – at least in part.

“You wouldn’t find it as difficult as you think, you know. You’re an immensely gifted scholar, and a very hard worker. In addition, your fellow Gryffindors Miss MacDonald and Miss McKinnon will be in the same class.”

This didn’t sound too bad, actually. He was very fond of the two M’s now, and it would be fun to spend a bit more time with them. How nice it would be to have a lesson in which there was no Sirius showing off, no Peter trying to copy his notes – and no James acting like a prat to get Lily’s attention.

“Ok.” He said. “I’ll give it a go.”

“Excellent.” McGonagall smiled widely, looking genuinely pleased. She waved her wand over his form to amend it.

“Um... Professor?” He asked, suddenly, slightly nervous again.

“Yes, Lupin?”

“I... well I was thinking about another subject, too. Maybe... maybe instead of Divination?”

McGonagall’s smile turned wry.

“Well I can’t pretend I’ve ever seen much use in Divination myself... not unless the witch or wizard concerned is genuinely gifted with the sight.”

Remus nodded, assuming that this meant he was not thus gifted.

“I thought, maybe... I mean, it’s probably silly...” *James had said it was silly. A girly subject.*

“Um... Care of Magical Creatures.” He said, all in a rush.

McGonagall looked genuinely surprised.

“This is something which interests you?”

“Um... yeah, I s’pose so. Not just because I’m... y’know. But. Yeah, I s’pose mostly because of

that.”

“Well, it’s a very interesting subject,” McGonagall sipped her tea again. “I should say that if you’re more interested in that than Divination, then by all means.”

“Great, ok, change it.” He nodded, feeling a bit embarrassed but also quite pleased with himself. McGonagall waved her wand once more.

“Your father was rather gifted when it came to magical creatures, you know.” She said. Remus raised his eyebrows.

“I didn’t know.”

“Oh yes,” She nodded, as if she was just passing the time of day. “An expert in his field.”

“His… field?”

“Non-human spirituous apparitions. Boggarts and ghosts, you know – dementors, too. All rather dark, I’m afraid. Care of Magical Creatures mainly focuses on corporeal – that is to say, *mortal* creatures, but you may well share his talents.”

“Oh, right. Thanks, Professor.” Remus got up, quickly. He didn’t have *time* to think about his father now. He had so much to do. “I’ve got to get to the library.” He indicated his heavy bag, splitting at the seams.

“Yes, yes, quite,” McGonagall nodded. “Thank you, Remus. I’ll see you at the feast tonight.”

“Yeah, bye!”

As he finally exited McGonagall’s office, Remus glanced at the clock. It was ten to eleven. Damn. No time for the library now, he had to meet Peter on the grounds, and it usually took at least fifteen minutes to get out of the castle, providing none of the staircases forced you off track. Heaving his unreasonably weighty bookbag, Remus sighed and set off on his way.

By the time he reached the greenhouses, sweating and too hot in the bright sunshine, Peter had obviously been waiting for a little while, and was wringing his hands.

“There you are!” He gasped, “I thought something had happened.”

“Sorry,” Remus panted, wiping his forehead with his sleeve, “McGonagall wanted a chat. Everything go ok?”

“Yep,” Peter nodded, eyes darting around, “Just like James told me. Have you seen them?”

“Nope.”

“Everything should be ok, then. Here.” Peter handed Remus the invisibility cloak.

“Cheers. Oi, are you going back to the dorm?”

“Yeah, I still need to pack…”

“Great, mind taking my books back? I wanted to return them to the library, but McGonagall…”

“Ok,” Peter took the bag. “Bloody hell, Moony!” He groaned, sagging under the weight of it.

“I’ll see you at lunch?”

“Probably. Good luck!” Peter went scurrying off back towards the castle, leaving Remus alone again.

Glancing around to make sure the coast was clear, Remus wasted no time in approaching the equipment shed. He’d been in it once before for a detention in his first year – it was much bigger on the inside than it looked, and full of various tools for maintaining the expansive Hogwarts grounds. The lock did not respond to the usual *Alohomora* incantation, but it absolutely *did* respond to a few quick twists with one of Lily Evans’ hairpins. She’d given him the pin the evening before, with a quizzical look, but hadn’t asked why he needed it.

Once inside, Remus acted quickly, finding the large black trunk of umbrellas. He wasn’t quite sure why wizards still used umbrellas – surely there were spells for protecting yourself from rain? But, nevertheless, they didn’t want anyone summoning them and ruining their fun. Remus covered the trunk with the invisibility cloak and cast a weightlessness charm on it, before levitating the whole thing out of the shed.

He strolled back up to the school in a leisurely manner, trying not to look as though he was up to anything at all, hiding his wand under his robes so no one could see that it was guiding the invisible trunk. It took a good half an hour to navigate himself and the trunk through the castle unnoticed, and without bumping into any other students. Several times he had to levitate the thing over his own head, which took a lot of effort and concentration.

Still, he did it, reaching his destination with an enormous sense of achievement. He left the trunk in the dorm room, and performed a sticking charm on the lock. If anyone *did* try to summon it, they hopefully wouldn’t be able to get it open in time to save themselves. He folded the cloak neatly and left it on James’s pillow.

Peter had dropped Remus’s book bag at the foot of his bed, and Remus sighed to himself, realising that he would have to return the books before he could go for lunch. Hoisting it onto his back, he once more descended the staircase into the Gryffindor common room.

Once again, he was waylaid, this time by Lily, who looked extremely flustered and extremely pleased to see him.

“There you are!” She shrieked, grabbing his shoulders, “I’ve been looking for you everywhere!”

“Hiya Lily,” he smiled, politely, “Sorry, can it wait? I’ve got to get to the—”

“Absolutely not!” She shook her head vehemently, “Can we go up to your room? The others aren’t there, are they?”

“No,” he sighed. He could go to the library later, if he skipped trying to finish his book, or if his visit to Madam Pomfrey didn’t take too long. He followed Lily back up the stairs.

“Do I want to know what that is?” She said, glancing at the big black trunk.

“It’s a trunk full of umbrellas.” He said, promptly. She raised an eyebrow, but didn’t question him further.

“I’ve got something for you.” She put down her bag on top of the trunk, rifling through it. She withdrew a very strange item. It looked like a sheet of clear plastic. Remus furrowed his brow, as she handed it to him. He turned it over.

“Erm... Lily...?”

“I’m sorry it took me so long – I had to wait ages for the acetate. My mum got it from a friend of hers who’s a teacher. They use them for overhead projectors in muggle schools. Well, you know that, obviously.”

Remus nodded, blankly. There had been an OHP at St Edmund’s, but it had needed its lightbulb replacing about three years ago and as far as he knew no one had yet got around to it.

“Got a book?” Lily nodded at his bag. “Get one out, I’ll show you.”

He complied, curious to see where this was going. She opened the text at a random page, placed it on the trunk, then lay the acetate over it. “Look.” She said.

Remus looked, about to withdraw his wand in case she wanted him to read something. She shook her head, pushing his hand away. “Just look.” She said.

He looked again, rubbing his neck.

‘There are three key elements to performing a successful unbreakable vow. In the first instance...’

“What?!” Remus exclaimed, picking up the book and staring.

“Did it work?!” Lily looked at him, eagerly, “Can you read it?”

“I... yeah... I... bloody hell, Evans!” He flipped the page again, replacing the acetate. It worked. It was much less fiddly than Sirius’s spell.

“It should work outside of Hogwarts, too.” She said, her green eyes sparkling, “I fiddled about with the incantation a bit, and there was some potion work involved, but it should last a good long time.”

“You’re amazing!” Remus said, still reading. “Thank you so much!”

Quite out of the blue, Lily leapt at Remus, flinging her arms around his neck and hugging him. Taken a bit by surprise, Remus felt himself blushing. He’d never been hugged very often before – let alone by a girl. She was soft, and her hair smelled nice, like apples.

“I wanted to do it in time for your birthday,” she said, stepping back, still smiling, “But I kept messing it up. Thank goodness it worked! You’d have thought I was mental if it hadn’t!”

“Yeah,” he laughed, nervously, still recovering from the surprise embrace. “Thank you Lily, this is... it’s just such an amazing thing.”

“You deserve it, Remus,” she said, earnestly, “Honestly, you work so bloody hard, and you keep up with Potter and Black.”

Remus shrugged. There was a slightly awkward silence.

“Look, I’ll let you get on.” Lily said, finally, “Sorry I waylaid you like that. See you at the feast?”

“Yeah... yeah definitely.” Remus looked back down at the book. “Oh shit, wait – Evans, have you got an umbrella?”

“Er... I think so? I might have packed it already.”

“Unpack it,” he said, firmly. “And take it to the feast, ok?”

“...Ok?”

Once she had left, Remus allowed himself a moment to sit down. He couldn't believe she'd done it. He couldn't believe he hadn't thought of it! It was so simple, so elegant. He would be able to read all summer! He flipped to another page.

‘It is important to note that the unbreakable vow, once made, cannot be superseded by any other kind of vow, oath or promise made thereafter, regardless of any legal or moral concerns around keeping such a vow. It is therefore pivotal that—‘

“Oh!” Remus gasped, suddenly. It was as if there was a ‘click’ in his brain, and everything had fallen into place. “OH!” He leapt up.

The library would have to be put off just a little while longer.

* * *

It was at times like this, Remus thought, as he paced up and down the dark corridor, that he could really do with the completed marauders map. Unfortunately, they had so far only managed to map three quarters of the castle, and were a long way off tagging every student yet.

Remus had been waiting outside the Slytherin common room for twenty minutes now, with no luck at all. The green robed students who passed him ignored his pleas for help, and even the Bloody Baron had carried on his way with a disdainful sniff. It was getting hopeless. He would miss lunch at this rate. He looked at the nearest clock. It was half past twelve. Phase one of the plan was imminent.

When the common room wall opened once more, his heart sank even further.

“Well well well.” Snape smirked, “They said there was a mad Gryffindor on the loose, but I didn't think it would be *you*, Loony Lupin.”

Remus sighed.

“Piss off, Snivellus.”

“Don't be so rude,” Snape raised his wand, “I ought to wash your mouth out with soap.”

“I didn't think you knew *how* to wash.” Remus replied, dryly.

“Why, you—”

“Can we not?” Remus said, irritably, “It's the last day of term, and there's plenty of stuff I'd rather be doing. Can you just... I dunno, let me in or something?”

“Let you in?!” Snape's black eyes shone with amusement, “Why on earth would I let you in?!”

“I need to speak to—”

“Out of the way, Snape, you slimy git.” A voice came from the wall behind Severus. Barty Crouch Jr. stepped out, followed by Regulus. Remus felt a small measure of relief,

“Regulus! Can you get Narcissa for m—”

“*Mordeo!*” Without warning, Crouch aimed a curse at Remus, who dodged it just in time, pulling out his own wand.

“*Expelli-*” He started, but it was too late, Crouch cursed him a second time, and pain rocketed through Remus’s skull, his head ringing. It was awful, but he didn’t flinch. It only hurt for a while, and he knew pain like an old friend. If they thought that something as commonplace as that would stop him, they had another thing coming.

“What d’you want, half-blood?” Crouch asked, grinning madly, “Or are you just thick, hanging around here all alone?”

“He *is* thick,” Severus said, “As two short planks.”

“Shut up, Snape,” Crouch said, turning his wand on Severus, now. Remus narrowed his eyes, paying attention. Apparently, Snape was bad at making friends wherever he went.

“Shut up both of you,” Regulus finally spoke, sounding bored. He had been watching Remus’s face the whole time, “What’d you want, Lupin? Better tell me before Barty fancies practicing one of his unforgiveable’s on you.”

“I need to speak to Narcissa.” Remus said, very clearly and as calmly as he could. “It’s urgent. It’s about... you know, Black family stuff.”

Regulus watched him for a few moments longer, not speaking. He was so like Sirius – only without any of the joy or humour. If Remus hadn’t known better, he’d have said Regulus was the elder brother.

“Snape, go and get my cousin, will you?” He said, sharply, not even moving his head.

Snape looked furious, but he obeyed. Did everyone do whatever the Blacks told them to? James often teased Sirius for acting as though he was royalty, but perhaps he was just playing the role he’d been raised for.

Crouch soon grew bored, and wandered off, leaving Regulus and Remus still facing each other in stony silence. Remus was actually glad to see Narcissa’s sour face, when she finally came through the wall.

“Oh Merlin,” she sighed, staring down at Remus, “What *now?*”

“I’ve figured it out!” He said, quickly, “The... the problem. I’ve got a solution.”

“Oh yes?” She folded her arms, looking unconvinced.

“The unbreakable vow,” he hurried, keen to get it all out so that he could go. “It can’t be broken, ever.”

She snorted,

“Yes, that’s certainly implied.”

Remus rolled his eyes impatiently.

“I *mean*,” he said, more slowly, his bravery mounting, “That if you’ve made an unbreakable vow, then you can’t make any other promises that go against it. You can’t even be forced to make other promises. Or *vows*.” He stressed the last word, meaningfully.

The light switched on in Narcissa's eyes almost immediately. For a second, her pretty pink lips formed the same 'oh' that Remus had made only an hour or so before when it had come to him. She did not have time to speak, however, because in the same moment there was a shriek from somewhere up the hall, causing them all to turn. A Slytherin girl came bursting out of a girl's bathroom at the end of the corridor, wailing,

"They all just... exploded!" She said, looking fainting disturbed. Sure enough, they could see through the swinging toilet door behind her that waves of pink foam were spilling from the wash basins and toilets. It was truly magnificent – gorgeous great drifts of soft soapy bubbles tumbled out of every tap and drain.

"I um... I have to go!" Remus grinned, winking at Narcissa, then breaking into a run.

Second Year: The Long Last Day (Part 2)

The rest of the afternoon was nothing short of chaotic – and Remus knew that Sirius and James, wherever they were, must be having the time of their lives. Every single bathroom in the castle had been mysteriously affected by the foam flood, and no one seemed to be able to stop it for very long. Huge drifts of bubbles clogged the hallways like pink snow, and those students who didn't want to play in it did not appear to mind being forced out onto the grounds to loll about on the grass and spend their last day in the sunshine.

Remus, who had already had to sacrifice his lunch hour, still needed to get to the library and return his books, help Sirius pack (though, actually, he told himself, as he pelted up the stairs to Gryffindor tower, he had done quite enough to help Sirius for one day) and see Madam Pomfrey for an end of year check-up. He also needed to get to the Great Hall early to help James and Sirius with the final phase of their plan. It was not complex magic, but it was strong, and ideally needed as many wands as possible.

Library first, he thought to himself, purposefully as he entered the now desolate common room. At least there was no one to hold him up now. One of the others had obviously been in the dorm room since Remus had last left it, because it was even messier than before and the invisibility cloak was now missing.

James, who was probably the tidiest of all four of them, had packed all of his things the night before, and neatly made his bed. Remus's space was tidy only because it was now entirely empty except for his pyjamas and book by the bedside table. Peter had apparently tried to pack at some point, but been disturbed halfway through – his trunk was flung open, various items of clothing hanging out of it, a pile of textbooks on his bed, and his red tie hanging from the frame. Sirius's bed was by far the worst. He must have come up looking for something at some point, because every draw in his dresser was open, his bedsheets had been ripped back, and his trunk stood completely empty.

Remus grabbed his book bag and left straight away – he would think about it later. He wished he still had the invisibility cloak as he dodged Peeves once more. The poltergeist was in his element, diving into the piles of foam, then bursting out at unsuspecting students and teachers. Remus briefly remembered what McGonagall had said that morning about his father '*boggarts, poltergeists...*' he wondered what his father – his duelling champion, Ravenclaw father who had a temper – had thought of Peeves.

"Good afternoon, Madam Pince," Remus said, quietly and respectfully as he entered the library. It was almost entirely empty, and the pinched faced old librarian was sorting through a towering pile of recently returned books with her wand, firing them back to their shelves with great relish.

"Lupin." She said, not even turning her head to greet him.

He placed his books carefully on the counter furthest from her.

Though the library no longer frightened him, exactly, Remus was still pretty nervous around Madam Pince, who would clearly have preferred that no students be permitted to touch her precious books at all. "Is that all of them?" She said, sharply, "I shall know, if not."

"Definitely all of them." He said, backing away slowly.

"Mr Pettigrew has not returned *Poisonous plants of the British Isles*, and the elder Mr Black has

three overdue transfiguration books.”

“Oh, ok... um... I’ll let them know when I see them.”

“I shall be writing to their parents if I don’t have them by five o’clock.”

“I’ll tell them.” He repeated, almost out of the door. Sighing with relief, he made his way to the hospital wing at a leisurely pace, fighting the urge to throw himself headlong into a snowball fight the Hufflepuffs were having against the Slytherins with the foam.

It seemed that the spell was still going strong – even more bubbles were emanating from the bathrooms he passed, and if he wasn’t much mistaken, they were growing larger. He had no idea where Sirius, James and Peter were at that moment, but he knew they had to be enjoying themselves immensely.

“Remus, dear!” Madam Pomfrey smiled as he entered the hospital wing. “Thank you for stopping by – I know you’d much rather be having fun with your friends today.”

He shrugged with a small smile,

“I don’t mind.”

“Just a few things before the summer begins, shall we go in my office?”

He followed her in, and accepted the plate of biscuits she offered him gratefully – his stomach was growling from having missed lunch.

“Now,” Madam Pomfrey sat down, conjuring up his patient notes from thin air, “I’ve tried contacting your Matron at St Edmund’s a few times... it seems she’s not clear on how the post works. Keeps trying to get me to speak to her on some muggle contraption. I told her, we don’t *have* a telling-bone at Hogwarts, but I don’t think she believes me...”

“No,” Remus stifled a laugh, “she wouldn’t.”

“Anyway, between us we’ve managed to agree that I shall be present before and after your confinement for both full moons. I’ve explained to her that your condition has become... more difficult over the past year, but that there should be no danger to anyone else at the school.”

“Right.” Remus nodded. Now that he was used to the idea, he was quite glad Pomfrey would be there, however briefly, over the holidays. It would make the full moons slightly less grim, anyway.

“I want you to make sure you look after yourself in the meantime. Eat full meals and get a nice balance of rest and exercise.”

Remus didn’t have the heart to tell Madam Pomfrey that he had very little say in when he was allowed to rest and how often he exercised while he was living at St Edmunds. No one at Hogwarts seemed to understand what sort of an institution it was.

After that, she checked on a few of his wounds from the previous moon to ensure they were healing properly, then performed some diagnostic spells. It was almost four o’clock by the time he was walking back to Gryffindor for what felt like the hundredth time that day.

Filch had had no success yet in taming the foam, but it had at least stopped spurting from every tap and drain in the castle. The others must have got bored and moved onto something else. As Remus climbed the tower, he saw a few students flying past the windows on their brooms. It was a

gorgeous day outside, the other marauders were probably out there making the most of it too.

He got a shock when he reached the dorm.

“Hiya Moony,” James grinned at him. He was alone, on Sirius’s side of the room. He was packing. “Nice job getting the umbrellas.”

“Yeah, well done on the foam. Filch is fuming.” He rubbed the back of his head, feeling awkward, “Where’s Sirius?”

“Doing something mental on his broom, I think. Thought I’d sort this out for him.”

“Do you want help?”

“Nah, don’t worry. Didn’t you want to read a book or something?”

Remus shrugged. He felt a bit embarrassed now. It seemed right that James do it, after all – James was Sirius’s best *best* friend.

“S’ok, I’ll help you.” He said, casually, as if it didn’t matter much either way. “You know I hate flying.”

“Nice of you,” James smiled easily, gathering up some of Sirius’s mess and sorting it quickly. Remus started tidying up the records, stacking in alphabetical order because Sirius liked it that way. “Put those in my trunk,” James said, nodding at the box of records, “The muggle books too. Said I’d look after them for him. Y’know, the way things are with his mum and dad.”

Remus nodded, carrying them over to James’s bed.

“Going to be a rubbish summer, without you two,” James remarked, sounding genuinely sorry.

“Yeah.” Remus replied, not really sure what else to say.

“Sirius thinks... he thinks he might not be coming back in September.”

“What?!” Remus looked up, suddenly, alarmed. James frowned,

“Yeah, he reckons with this betrothal thing... they might send him to Durmstrang. Keep him out of trouble until they can get him married. Pretty drastic, I think, but I wouldn’t put it past them.”

“The betrothal ceremony might not happen, though,” Remus said, quickly, “I have a feeling... I just feel like Narcissa won’t let it happen.” He didn’t want to tell James anything yet – because James would tell Sirius, and Sirius might get annoyed that Remus went behind his back to talk to his family. And what if it didn’t even work? He couldn’t get anyone’s hopes up.

“Narcissa?” James looked at him curiously, “What are you talking about?”

“I just know she doesn’t want to marry Sirius any more than he wants to marry her, that’s all.” Remus shook his head. “Shall I pack his muggle magazines in your trunk too?”

* * *

“What a wonderful year it’s been,” Dumbledore beamed at the Great Hall as the final scraps of the end of year feast vanished from their plates. Remus was going to miss the food more than anything, and had had three helpings of pudding. Ravenclaw had won the house cup that year, and the hall was decked out in royal blue and bronze silk banners. Every time the Ravenclaw table had cheered

during the meal, Remus had felt a tug behind his navel and thought of his father.

Dumbledore's speech continued, "I am immensely proud of all of you, of course. Now we are all well fed, I have a few words I would like to say..."

"Ready, lads," Sirius whispered under his breath, so low that only the marauders could hear. Dumbledore continued,

"...congratulations once again to Ravenclaw..."

"Now!"

"...winning this year's house---"

There was a shriek from the far end of the hall, and everyone spun around to watch every single goblet on the Ravenclaw table to suddenly spurt red and gold bubbles. They fired upward in great geysers, hitting the ceiling and bursting in a shower of bright droplets, which fell like rain onto the students below, staining their robes with streaks of Gryffindor crimson.

"Keep going!" Sirius whispered, his voice high with excitement, as the marauders flicked their wands using every ounce of concentration. At once, the goblets on every other table erupted too, causing the same effect as students shrieked and began to duck for cover, their hair, skin and clothes staining vibrant red and gold.

Not even the Gryffindor table had escaped – not wanting to miss out on the fun, James had insisted on it. Lily Evans had brought her umbrella, and grinned slyly at Remus as Mary and Marlene fought to cram underneath it with her. In the far corner of the hall, Remus caught sight of a furious Narcissa hiding underneath the table, her long white hair streaked with red and gold which clashed awfully with her porcelain complexion.

She was glaring at her wayward cousin so hard that Remus wondered how Sirius did not drop dead on the spot. But he comforted himself with the thought that this incident can only have cemented the idea in her mind that she must escape marriage to Sirius at all costs.

"*Omnistratum!*" Dumbledore said, calmly, aiming his wand at the ceiling.

At once, the bubbles burst and evaporated into nothing, as though a large force field had suddenly appeared over their heads. "Scourgify!" The headmaster smiled pleasantly, now waving his wand over the whole hall. Instantly, the red and gold paint had vanished from the tables, floor and students. Order was restored.

"Aw." James sighed, sounding disappointed.

"An excellent way to celebrate Gryffindor's victory on the quidditch pitch this year," Dumbledore cleared his throat, as students clambered back into their seats, eyeing their goblets nervously. "And while I welcome and encourage displays of house pride, I would like everyone to remember that true sportsmanship lies in the ability to gracefully cede victory. Please join me in raising your glasses to Ravenclaw, winners of the Hogwarts house cup 1973."

Remus had the uncomfortable feeling that though Dumbledore did not look in the marauder's direction, they were absolutely the intended audience for this admonishment. He felt a little ashamed – but only a very little. It was hard to feel too sorry when there had really been no harm done, and he was so full of excellent food.

James and Sirius were already planning next year's finale, Peter grinning and nodding along like a simpleton. Lily winked at Remus as they raised their goblets, and he hoped that nothing would ever change.

Summer 1973

Chapter Summary

For the lovely ChristineBH, and anyone else who is loving 'Thug Life Remus'. :P

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Saturday 30th June 1973

Dear Remus,

I've only been back at my parents' house for half an hour and I've been told I'm bringing shame to my family five times. Five. Three of those times weren't even from living people – the portraits of our ancestors have decided to have a go.

Going to start putting up my Gryffindor stuff now, I think.

Hope you got home ok.

Sirius O. Black

* * *

Dear Sirius,

Your owl arrived before I even got back – we had to get two tubes and a bus, it took ages.

Sorry about the family stuff. Be careful. Wish we were all back at school.

Remus.

* * *

Friday 13th July 1973

Dear Moony,

Come and visit soon, me and Peter will die of boredom!

Don't send Sirius any owls – his mother intercepted mine and returned them all with curses attached! Luckily dad spotted it before we had any trouble, but bloody hell! I might try contacting his cousin Andromeda to see how she gets post through. I think it's the muggle way, but Godrick knows how we're supposed to understand that – I haven't even opened my muggle studies books yet.

Let me know if you can come and visit. Remember mum said any time. We can talk to your Matron, and Madam Pomfrey – the Minister for Magic, if we have to!

James.

* * *

Dear James,

I know how the post works, but I'd have to nick some stamps. And I don't what Sirius's address is.

I asked Pomfrey after the last moon – she said no. She said the wizarding world is too dangerous for me. I don't know if she means I'm the one that's dangerous.

Sorry mate.

Moony.

* * *

Sunday 5th August 1973

Dear Moony,

So. You will not believe what happened. Seriously. The ceremony was all ready to go – I was in my hideous green dress robes (with black lace cuffs – *LACE*, Moony. Just wrap your mind around that. You would have thought I looked a right prat.) Regulus was there, my mother, father, half the family.

Then in comes Narcissa, wearing something that looked like it belonged to my grandmother. And she doesn't look happy, so I thought – well, fair enough, I'm not exactly thrilled. But then she stands up, in front of *everyone* and says "We have to stop at once."

So, everyone stops, and my mother looks like she's about to start spitting curses, and my uncle is asking Narcissa "what do you think you're playing at" and Regulus is grinning at me and Bellatrix is grinning too, only she looks a bit more mental than Reg. Then Narcissa whispers something to her parents and my aunt LITERALLY FAINTED. I shit you not. And everyone's muttering and whispering, and mother can't take it anymore and demands to know what's going on, so Narcissa stands up, and LOOKS MY MOTHER IN THE EYE and tells her.

She made an unbreakable vow to marry Lucius Malfoy as soon as she finishes her NEWTs.

I can't remember if I told you what an unbreakable vow is, but basically she can't *not* marry Malfoy now – or else they both drop dead. I don't know if I should be a bit offended on that point, to be honest. I mean what does it say about you when a girl would rather die than marry you, even if she is your cousin?

Anyway, as you can probably imagine, the whole Black family is at war, no one is talking to each other because a few curses ended up being thrown between my dad and my uncle. I can't believe Narcissa. Seriously, I actually got close to liking her for a second before I remembered she's still a Black, *and* a Slytherin, *and* she wants to marry Lucius slimy git Malfoy, of all people.

But it looks like I'm off the hook. There aren't any other cousins left for me to marry now. Everyone's furious, obviously, but for once no one's furious at me. I think I'll probably be coming back to Hogwarts in September – I heard mum talk about making Reg the heir instead. No skin off my nose, I couldn't care less about inheriting this foul house or their foul fortune. Rather they just leave me alone and keep ignoring me forever.

Hope your holiday is going as well as mine (though I can't see how it can be, because – honestly, what a bloody result, eh Moony??)

See you in a few weeks,

Sirius O. Black

* * *

Monday 6th August 1973

Dear Moony,

I bet Sirius has already told you the news, but just in case he hasn't – **THE BETROTHAL IS OFF!** You were right, it came down to Narcissa in the end. Uncanny ability you have there, Remu ol' pal, don't fancy giving me odds on the quidditch world cup next year, do you?

Having a really boring summer all by myself. Pete's lot are all off seeing their French relatives, so I don't even have anyone to help me practice my catches. Hope yours isn't too bad. I had a thought that maybe you could ask Madam Pomfrey to bring you to Diagon Alley in August? Or maybe we could meet you and drop you back after? Mum keeps asking after you, she'd love to see you again.

Get in touch if you can.

Yours in eternal boredom,

James.

* * *

Monday 13th August 1973

[Postcard depicting the Eiffel Tower in spring]

Dear Remus,

Bonjour and all that from Paris!

Hope your holidays are good. Wish you lot were here.

Peter.

* * *

Remus responded to each of these communications with vigour, much more so than he had the year before. The marauders had seen enough of his handwriting to know how wonky it was, and he didn't think they'd mind a few spelling mistakes. He told James he was very sorry, but he could not come to Diagon Alley (Madam Pomfrey said that wasn't safe either, and wouldn't tell him why) and he congratulated Sirius on his hard-won bachelorhood, but did not tell him that he, Remus, had anything to do with it. It would be too much like boasting, and he didn't want Sirius to feel like he owed him anything.

Remus's own summer was perhaps just as boring as James and Sirius's, but filled with more purpose than any summer before it. Madam Pomfrey was true to her word and arrived the evening before and the morning after each full moon. As such, he spent less time covered in bandages, and had more time to read and plan for his year ahead.

When his books arrived courtesy of Dumbledore and the Hogwarts second hand bin, Remus was

thrilled to be able to get a head start on his reading. Arithmancy was very difficult, but the challenge was exciting – and Care of Magical Creatures was utterly absorbing, if only because of the fantastic colour illustrations.

Even Matron commented – somewhat suspiciously – that Remus had changed a great deal after two years away at school.

“Nice to see you’re keeping out of trouble.” She said one morning, when she found him sitting at the bottom of the garden reading a heavy textbook using his magical sheet of acetate. At the time, Remus simply squinted up at her and smiled benignly. She of course had no idea that before the summer was over he was to have committed his first serious crime.

Ever since his Christmas with the Potters, Remus had been plagued with one particular problem, and he wasn’t sure how best to overcome it. Money. He didn’t have any – muggle or wizard, Remus was as poor as you could possibly be. This had never mattered a great deal – after all, St Edmund’s supplied his basic needs, and Hogwarts gave him everything else.

But. But. He would have liked, at the very least, to be able to return the generosity his friends had shown him. They’d bought him countless sweets and gifts; Sirius had given him the ability to read, for goodness’ sake, and Lily had singlehandedly rescued his summer. For some time now, Remus had resolved to seek out the soonest opportunity that might result in payment.

Fortunately for Remus, this opportunity presented itself one hot June afternoon. He was reading again, of course, sitting outside on a bench under the shade of an old pub umbrella which must have been donated at some point since his first year. Now was he was thirteen, while Remus was not among the eldest boys at St Edmund’s, he was no longer at the bottom of the pile, and could generally escape being picked on too badly.

A shadow fell over his book, and he looked up. Craig Newman, a sixteen-year-old skinhead, glared down at him. Craig’s gang was the top of the pecking order at St Eddy’s. They all listened to reggae, wore bovver boots and drainpipe jeans held up by suspenders. Some of them had tattoos, and all of them had bruises.

“Orright, Lupin.” Craig grunted at him. Remus blinked, slowly closing his book and wondering if it was much good as a weapon. It was heavy, anyway.

“Orright, Newman.” He nodded, trying not to look small and scared. He slipped naturally back into his old accent over the summer, slurring words and dropping consonants. It was safest.

“‘t’chu readin?” Craig squinted down at the book, looking mistrustful. Remus wondered if Craig could read. He shrugged, nonchalantly,

“Jus’ summink for school.”

“Yeah,” Craig nodded. Remus didn’t move a muscle. He couldn’t understand what was happening – did Craig really just want a casual chat? “You’re clever, in’t ya?” The older boy said, suddenly.

Remus didn’t know which response was more likely to get him beaten up, so he didn’t answer at all. No matter, Craig didn’t seem to mind. He just scratched his chin, then pulled a packet of cigarettes out of his shirt sleeve. “Yeah, you’re clever. Always readin’ an’ that.” He lit the cigarette with a match from his boot, then offered Remus the packet.

Remus reached out and took one. He’d never smoked before, but most of the boys at St Edmund’s did. Craig lit it for him, and Remus inhaled. His eyes filled with tears at once, and he tried

desperately not to cough and splutter. It was disgusting.

Craig looked at him with some amusement and continued. "Small, too. Skinny, like."

"I s'pose." Remus replied, coughing, watching Craig inhale and then trying to copy him.

"Fancy comin' on a job?"

"Job?"

Craig nodded, his tiny eyes fixed on Remus.

"Yeah. you'd be good. Gonna do over the offie in town. Tomorrow night. Ain't got no security. Ain't got nuffink, c'ept a dog. Goin' after the till and the booze. You can have a share. Just need to pop you through the back window."

"Right," Remus nodded, as if the prospect did not utterly terrify him. He sucked on the cigarette again, out of habit this time. He could sort of see the appeal, once you got over the taste. He considered Craig's suggestion.

On the one hand, it was bloody dangerous. Newman's gang weren't known for their finesse, and a few of them were already on probation. On the other hand, it did not seem as though he had much choice. When Craig Newman wanted you to do something, you sort of just had to do it. Plus, he could definitely benefit. Muggle money was all but useless to him, of course, but there might be a way...

Remus looked Craig Newman in his little piggy eyes.

"I just want fags."

Craig smirked and nodded. And so, Remus began his short career as a burglar.

Chapter End Notes

UK slang dictionary:

Skinhead – British subculture made up of working class youths in and around London during the 1960s, '70s and 80s. They listened to ska and reggae and were into Jamaican rude boy culture. They were known for being violent and getting into fights. Later (in the late '70s and '80s) the movement became white nationalist and 'skinhead' became shorthand for racist.

Bovver boots – heavy, black, steel toed boots worn by skinheads. Often doc martens or army surplus.

Do over/doing over – Rob/burglarise.

Offie – Off-Licence. British term for convenience store/tobacconist.

Third Year: Home Again

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

In the corner of the morning in the past

I would sit and blame the master first and last

All the roads were straight and narrow

And the prayers were small and yellow

And the rumour spread that I was aging fast

Then I ran across a monster who was sleeping

By a tree

And I looked and frowned and the monster was me

Saturday 1st September 1973

After the first job, Craig and his gang had been so pleased with Remus that they'd taken him along on four more, to houses and small businesses in the surrounding towns. Even without an invisibility cloak, Remus found that he just had a natural gift for getting into places he shouldn't. That's what Craig said anyway; "Bloody natural, this kid."

Nature was a funny thing, Remus found himself thinking, on the way to King's Cross. He remembered James leaving a bag of coins behind every time they raided Honeyduke's. It was not in James's nature to steal, it seemed. But Remus didn't think this was a particularly fair assessment, when James had never *needed* to steal. He was the heir to an enormous fortune, just like Sirius. And the truth was, you just never knew what you were capable of until you tried it. It must be very easy to be good when you had no reason *not* to be.

Still, Remus had resolved never to tell the other marauders what he'd got up to that summer, and spent the rest of his journey daydreaming about all of the Christmas and birthday presents he would finally be able to buy his friends.

Remus's Hogwarts trunk this year was stuffed full of cigarette boxes and pouches of tobacco. Plenty to get a little business up and running – if he was savvy enough, he might be rid of most of it before Christmas. They were allowed to go to Hogsmeade this year, and Matron had signed his permission slip without a fuss – even Madam Pomfrey thought it was probably safe enough for him to go.

Matron, it seemed, had learnt her lesson. She accompanied Remus as far as King's Cross, then left him there, with a curt goodbye. Heart pounding as much as it had two years ago, Remus flew at the ticket barrier, and exhaled only once he arrived safely on the other side. He was home again.

It did not take him long to spy Sirius, who was slouching against a station pillar beside his family. Mrs Black was fussing over Regulus, who looked paler than usual and was standing with his back very straight as Walpurga combed his hair and hissed in his ear. She was obviously ignoring her eldest son, whose hair looked deliberately messy, and whose robes were artfully rumpled and out of place. Remus thought it best not to approach.

"Hiya Moony," he was clapped on the back and turned around to see James and Peter grinning at him. James had grown a few inches, and his face looked slightly thinner, but he had the same bright brown eyes and the same mop of black hair. Peter looked himself, though he seemed to be recovering from a rather painful sunburn.

“Hi,” Remus grinned back at them, his heart leaping with excitement. Everything just as it should be.

The whistle blew, and they climbed onto the train to find an empty compartment and wait for Sirius. He was finally allowed to join them at what seemed like the very last minute, and entered the car muttering darkly to himself,

“Keeping up appearances *my arse*.”

“No change there, then,” James winked at Remus. Sirius looked at them all and his face split into a smile. That Sirius Black smile.

“I thought I’d never see you all again!”

“Godrick, you always have to be so dramatic.” James punched him on the shoulder, as they all stood up to greet him.

“You don’t know what she’s like,” Sirius whined, clasping James’s hand in a warm, brotherly handshake. Then he saw Remus and smirked mischievously, “Is that you, Moony?!” He deliberately craned his neck, raising a hand as if to shield his eyes and peering up, “Can you hear me up there?”

“Ha ha.” Remus replied, shifting uncomfortably. “I’m the same height as James.”

“Not any more you’re not,” James countered, standing closer to Remus so that he could see that he was indeed half an inch taller than the dark-haired boy.

“Yeah, how did I end up mates with two beanpoles, eh?” Sirius grinned, slapping Remus on the back playfully, “Lucky I’ve got you, eh Petey-boy?”

“Hm?” Peter looked up from his pasty, confused. Peter Pettigrew looked no taller than he had been when they were all eleven, though he was considerably wider.

Sirius appeared to be growing up gracefully and in perfect proportion, which was just typical. He was a little taller, but not lanky like James, slender, but not skinny like Remus. His jaw had broadened over the summer too, the shadow of manhood rising in his features.

“Right,” James rubbed his hands together as they all sat down, “Now all that’s out of the way – I say we move onto new business. Plans for the year?”

“We have to finish the map,” Remus said, quickly. That had been playing on his mind for some time. “It’s not far off, and I bet we can figure out that homunculus charm if we really put the effort in.”

“Definitely,” James said, “The map is basically our legacy, right? We’ll work on it, I promise.”

“And that other thing,” Sirius suddenly said, very sharply. James and Peter exchanged glances, and Remus felt a knot tighten in his stomach.

“What ‘other’ thing?” He asked, frowning.

James looked him in the eye, looking very serious.

“Just something we were talking about last year. We’ll um... we’ll let you know if we decide to go through with it.”

“Don’t want to get you into trouble, Moony,” Peter laughed, nervously, “Less you know the better, eh?”

Remus took umbrage to this. Hadn’t he got away with participating in most of last year’s pranks, *and* had the least detentions? And hadn’t he been the only one who’d even attempted to talk to Narcissa about Sirius’s family problems? Of course, the others didn’t know about that – if they had a secret, he could have one too. He looked out of the window, testily, ignoring the rest of the conversation.

Finally, Peter sighed heavily,

“Where’s the trolley witch? I’m *hungry*.”

“I just saw you finish a pasty.” James replied, mildly annoyed because he’d been midway through explaining his plan to bewitch all the Slytherin quidditch team’s brooms during their next practice.

“Yeah, but I fancy something sweet.” Peter pouted, emptying out his pockets and only coming up with empty wrappers.

Remus saw his chance and finally cheered up a bit,

“I’ve got you sorted, Pete,” he dug into his suitcase and pulled out a handful of chocolate bars, dumping them on the empty seat beside him. The other three boys stared at the pile.

“What are these?” Sirius picked up a Mars bar, looking suspicious.

“Muggle chocolate,” Remus said, “They’re good! Go on, won’t bite.”

Peter had already unwrapped and bitten into a Milky Way, and was grinning encouragingly at the others. Remus selected a packet of Maltesers for himself, sitting back with satisfaction knowing that for once he had brought the snacks on the train.

* * *

Remus noticed that they were sitting further away from the teacher’s table when they took their places for the feast. The first and second years now below them, the marauders found themselves no longer among the youngest students, which gave them an unnecessary sense of pride and achievement.

“You’re taking Runes, aren’t you Remus?” Lily asked, plonking herself down next to him. She had cut her hair over the summer, and had a soft fringe which made her look a bit like Jane Asher.

“Yep,” he nodded.

“Moony’s abandoning us!” Sirius wailed, comically, pretending to fall onto James’s shoulder, sobbing inconsolably,

“There, there,” James patted his friend’s back, solemnly, “I hope you’re happy, Remus,” he scolded, “All very well you moving on to bigger and better things, but think about us little people you’re leaving behind.”

“I’m not leaving anyone behind,” Remus muttered, his ears turning red, “Just didn’t fancy divination.”

“Ignore them,” Lily said, primly, casting a disapproving look at Sirius and James, who were now

holding each other, still pretending to weep hysterically as though their hearts were irreparably broken. Lily tutted, seeing she had no effect, and turned back to Remus, “You lot don’t have to be attached at the hip all the time. Anyway, I’m doing Runes too, have you done the pre-reading?”

Remus nodded enthusiastically,

“Yeah, it looks really interesting.”

“Aha!” Sirius looked up, slyly, “*Now* I see.”

“What?” Remus asked, nervously. Sirius had that wicked, unpredictable look in his eyes.

“I don’t think it has anything to do with furthering your academic career,” he scratched his chin, wisely, “*I* think our dear Remoony has been lured away from everyone’s favourite doss subject by the fairer sex!”

“Shut up,” Remus blushed harder, trying not to look at Lily. Sirius always knew exactly the most embarrassing thing to say.

“Yeah, shut up, Black,” Lily sighed, “Honestly you lot can’t even be nice to each other. Just because no girls would come near you with a five-foot barge pole—”

“I’ll have you know I was very recently engaged to be married,” Sirius replied, with a swish of his dark hair. James was snorting with laughter now, shoulders shaking.

“What else are you taking, Remus?” Lily asked, pointedly ignoring the other marauders.

“Care of Magical Creatures,” Remus sighed. He’d already had enough jokes about that from James and Sirius.

“Oooh!” Marlene turned around suddenly, “Me and Mary are taking that!”

“A-HA!” Sirius said again, even louder, and James completely fell apart.

Fortunately, the sorting began then and the hall fell silent. The ceremony was extremely dull unless you were involved in it, Remus found, and he struggled to hold back a yawn as the line of frightened first years gradually grew shorter, and the spaces at the top of the Gryffindor table filled up with new students. His attention wandered and he gazed over at the Slytherin table, where Narcissa was sitting at the far end, regal as a queen and looking much more cheerful than when he’d last seen her.

Regulus, now a second year, sat at the other end from his cousin, looking as bored as Remus felt. Then there was Snape, among the third year Slytherins, staring at Lily, as usual. He caught her eye once or twice and Remus saw her smile at him in her usual friendly way, but it didn’t seem to brighten Severus’s mood one bit. Only Lily could remain friends with someone that miserable, Remus thought to himself.

The feast, when it appeared, was as delicious and welcome as ever. Remus had his customary two helpings of everything, including pudding and once the meal was finished, Dumbledore gave his usual speech. For the past two years, Remus had switched off for this portion of the evening – being too full of good food and too sleepy from the long day to pay much attention. But something about the serious tone of the headmaster’s usually playful oration made him listen.

He saw that he was not the only one. There was a low, ominous muttering from the Slytherin table, particularly those in the upper years. The Gryffindors around Remus seemed to straighten up a little

more, too.

“What was that all about?” Remus asked, as they left the hall for their dorms, Dumbledore’s confusing warnings ringing in his ears, “‘Unity in the face of darkness,’ and all that?”

“Oh right, you won’t know...” James said, quietly. He looked at Sirius, who was scuffing his feet, hands in his pockets. “Tell you when we’re alone, ok?”

They waited to get that year’s password (‘*Codswallop*’) and headed straight up the stairs to their familiar dorm room. All of their beds were made, their trunks sitting by, and Remus felt a surge of happiness as he entered. Sirius began to unpack at once, pulling his beloved muggle records and books from James’s trunk. James only unpacked his broom, and began to polish it lovingly, sitting cross-legged on his bed.

“So?” Remus asked, impatiently, “The weird speech?”

“Oh, yeah,” James swallowed. He glanced at Sirius again, who appeared to be ignoring them. James sighed, running his hands through his hair. “It’s all politics, really.”

“Politics?” Remus groaned inwardly. He didn’t know much about muggle politics, let alone whatever went on in the wizarding world – other than the statute of secrecy, which they had covered in first year History. There was a referendum coming up about Britain joining the European Community – but that wasn’t for a few years, if Remus had understood the prime minister’s speeches correctly, and he couldn’t see how that affected wizards very much.

“Well, you know there are... um... well, dark wizards?”

“Yeah...” Remus tried to look knowledgeable. He remembered reading something briefly about Grindelwald, but they wouldn’t be studying that until their OWLs.

“There’s been a surge in dark magic lately, that’s all. And my dad told me... there’s some stuff going on at the ministry. Department heads pushing for stricter reforms against muggleborn wizards and... people who are different. Dad said it was nothing to worry about, just the usual old prejudices. But I s’pose Dumbledore thinks we need to be on our guard.”

“Mother and Father called a meeting.” Sirius said, suddenly. They both turned to look at him. He looked tormented, ashamed, and would not meet their eyes. “They wouldn’t let me in, obviously, but Reg went. They keep talking about this Dark Lord – I dunno, maybe a politician they want to back in the next election. All I know is if the Blacks are supporting him then he can’t be good.”

Even James didn’t have anything positive to say in light of this announcement. They were all quiet, until Peter spoke up.

“We’re at Hogwarts.” He said, “My mum always says Hogwarts is the safest place in Britain. And we’ve got Dumbledore.” He said firmly, settling the matter. “C’mon, Black, bet you’ve got another awful muggle record you’re just *dying* to assault our ears with.”

They all looked at Peter with mild surprise. Sirius grinned,

“Actually,” he said, dusting off his record player, “I have.”

Lyrics at the beginning of the chapter are the opening lines of 'Width of a Circle' from David Bowie's 'Man Who Sold the World' album.

Third Year: Fantastic Beasts

Friday 7th September 1973

By the end of his first week of third year, Remus felt like he needed another two months just to recover – and there hadn't even been a full moon yet. He felt foolish for not considering that adding three extra subjects to his timetable would also increase his workload. But of course it did, and by the time Friday rolled around he felt weighted down by the amount of homework to be completed over the weekend.

"It's not fair," Peter whined, "This year was supposed to be fun, with Hogsmeade and everything."

"We'll still go to Hogsmeade, Peter," James murmured over a complicated looking star chart.

"I'm with Pete," Sirius groaned, screwing up his dream diary for Divination, "Let's sack this off and go and use the quidditch pitch while it's still light."

James looked up, eagerly,

"Yeah, go on then."

All three of them stood.

"No thanks," Remus said, absentmindedly. He was actually quite enjoying his Transfiguration homework – an essay on bodily transformations. He was pretty good at basic modifications now, for covering up scars, and was able to answer the questions at length.

"Don't fancy looking over my muggle studies, do you, Moony?" Sirius asked, matily. Remus raised his eyebrows.

"If I have time. James, Pete, want me to look at yours?"

"Thanks Remus!" Peter grinned, tying up his shoelaces.

"Nah," James refused, "Thought I might ask Evans for a bit of help on it later."

"Losing battle, mate," Sirius counselled. "Dunno why you're so hung up on her."

James just shrugged, not looking at all discouraged.

Remus spent a satisfying hour or two by himself, completing the rest of his work for the week. He'd made a start on Potions, but thought it could bear leaving for a little bit longer – Peter could give him a hand in exchange for the muggle studies comprehension homework. They had double Potions on Mondays now, first thing – but thankfully no longer with the Slytherins. In fact, the only class they shared with Slytherin now was Arithmancy, and that wasn't a practical subject, so there was much less space for open house-warfare.

Arithmancy was a real surprise to Remus – he had expected to fall behind Sirius and James, at least at first. But it appeared that this subject was down to logic, rather than magical ability, and Remus had found his first lesson to be shockingly straightforward. The homework, which he knew Sirius and James had not yet attempted, was to calculate their own heart and character numbers using the Agrippan method. This he actually found quite soothing, though he knew he would never admit it to anyone.

Herbology plodded along at its usual pace – Remus couldn't pretend to be all that interested in it, but at least it wasn't difficult. Astronomy was not his strongest subject either, but luckily Peter was generally so thrilled to be the only one who knew something that he gave Remus most of the answers for nothing.

Then there was his new favourite subject; Care of Magical Creatures, on Wednesdays and Thursdays. He wasn't going to tell the others about that either – they already teased him for liking History so much, *and* for taking Runes. All good natured, of course – he made fun of them for doing Divination, which by the sounds of it was pretty dire.

He had read his copy of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* twice other the summer – it had been his favourite bedtime reading. The pictures and descriptions were so vivid they filled his dreams with the most spectacular images. There had been nothing in the set text – Remus was sure to check this – about werewolves. Fortunately, they weren't considered in the same league as 'magical creatures', and it looked as though they weren't going to be studying 'half-humans' until next year in Defence Against the Dark Arts.

"I hope we do unicorns," Marlene sighed, leaning against the wall as they queued outside the classroom for their first lesson. "Something really nice, like that."

Mary raised an eyebrow,

"I'd rather do dragons. Something a bit exciting!"

"I'm just glad we don't have Kettleburn." Marlene replied. This made Remus pay attention,

"Don't we? Who've we got, then?"

"Weren't you paying attention to Dumbledore at the feast?" Marlene looked at him disapprovingly. "Kettleburn's off in Romania or Bulgaria or something, doing some work for the ministry. I dunno how useful he this, though, he's not exactly in one piece..."

"So who've we got?"

"Whoever it is wasn't at the feast," Marlene shrugged, "But my timetable says 'Professor L. Ferox'."

As she said this, the classroom door opened and the fifth years ahead of them filed out, chatting animatedly. The Gryffindor third years went inside, and Remus took a desk by the window, next to Marlene. When the teacher emerged from his office, both Mary and Marlene – and, actually, every other girl in the class – sat up a little straighter.

He was a good deal younger than Kettleburn, who had been a bit grizzled, even in his middle age. Remus would have guessed this teacher to be in his early thirties. He still had all of his limbs, too, which was a definite plus. His hair was thick and sandy blond, long enough to reach halfway down his back. He wasn't dressed in robes like most teachers, but practical, out-doorsy clothes and heavy brown leather boots. He had a slightly weather-beaten face, which served to give his strong features a kind of rugged appeal. His eyes were bright blue, and gleamed as he smiled warmly at the class,

"Good afternoon!" He boomed, in a gruff Liverpudlian accent. He clapped his large calloused hands together, "Welcome to your first year of Care of Magical Creatures. I'm Professor Ferox. You've all got the Scamander text, I hope?"

The class immediately pulled out their copies of *Fantastic Beasts*, along with parchment and quills,

then looked up at him attentively. Professor Ferox continued to beam at them all.

“Excellent!” He continued, “A cracking read, as I’m sure some of you have already discovered. It gives you a nice, comprehensive guide to identifying and encountering most of the well-known magical creatures – but what it *can’t* give you – and what you’ll need to excel in this class – is quick thinking, cool-headedness, and nerves of steel.”

Some of the girls tittered at this, and Remus felt a flutter of excitement. *See James*, he thought ruefully, *it’s not a girly subject*. He wasn’t sure about the specifications, though. He had enough nerve, maybe – had to, after the summer he’d had – but cool-headedness was hardly one of his defining traits.

“Now,” Ferox clapped his hands together, as if eager to begin. He bent under his desk, “Look what I’ve got for you...” When he rubbed his palms the rough skin made a soft ‘shh’ sound – he obviously didn’t spend a lot of time inside, Remus thought to himself – Professor Ferox was clearly a man of action.

The teacher was now lifting a large wicker basket, setting it gently down on his desk. He opened it, and a large, furry creature stalked out. It was the biggest cat Remus had ever seen – with bushy silver fur patterned with dark spots, high pointed ears and a strange brush tail like a lion. It mewed, rather grumpily, then hopped up to sit on top of the basket so that it was almost eye level with Ferox. It glared imperiously down at the class, flicking its tail back and forth.

Professor Ferox stroked a long finger down the animal’s back, which it appeared to tolerate, blinking slowly.

“Can anyone tell me what sort of creature Achilles here is?”

“It’s a cat.” Mary said, bluntly, without raising her hand.

Ferox laughed cheerily,

“A common mistake, Miss...?”

“Macdonald. Mary Macdonald.”

“Miss Macdonald. No, Achilles is not a cat – though they are often interbred.”

“Ooh!” A Ravenclaw boy at the back of the room raised his hand,

“Yes, Mr...?”

“Stan Brooks, sir. Is it a kneazle, sir?”

“Five points to Ravenclaw!” Ferox nodded enthusiastically, “Achilles is a kneazle.”

Remus sighed, inwardly. He knew that – he ought to have known it, anyway, he could remember reading about the tail. Mentally he struck ‘quick thinking’ off the list of Ferox’s requirements. Hoping to show the professor that he was at least eager to learn, Remus began to take notes as Ferox spoke, still stroking Achilles absentmindedly.

“You can always identify a kneazle by its cat-like appearance, high level of intelligence, speckled fur and plumed tail,” the teacher said, indicating these features lovingly, “They are classified XXX by the ministry of magic – can anyone tell me what that means?”

Remus's hand shot up, this time, but so did Marlene's. Ferox picked her, asking her name as he did so.

"Marlene McKinnon," She smiled up at him, "Sir. XXX classified creatures are not recommended for domestication, but should not prove difficult for a qualified wizard to handle."

"Excellent. Five points to Gryffindor." Ferox tipped his head.

Remus fumed, silently. She'd read that straight from the book. Ferox carried on, "We will be focussing on XXX classified creatures for the rest of the year. Now, while it's true that kneazles are not recommended as pets – this is not because they are dangerous. In fact, anyone who tells you they're dangerous has likely found themselves on the wrong side of one, and should not be trusted. Can anyone tell me why?"

Remus's hand flew up again – it was all coming back to him now. But Ferox picked another Ravenclaw, this time.

"Because they can detect suspicious people." Davy Kirk piped up, earning another five points for Ravenclaw.

"Absolutely." The Professor smiled, "Kneazles are excellent judges of characters, and will react fiercely to anyone untrustworthy. As such, the ministry requires kneazle owners to hold the proper licence and have undergone certain proficiency tests. But as you can see," he stroked Achilles once more. The silver cat had barely moved a muscle, except to survey the class, "They do make wonderful pets, as long as they are shown proper respect and care."

"Is he yours then, professor?" Mary asked, batting her eyelashes flirtatiously, "He's *lovely*."

"He is indeed," Ferox replied, "If you're all careful and don't crowd him, Achilles will probably let you stroke him. Line up, class."

There was a general murmuring and scraping of chairs as everyone got to their feet and formed a queue. Remus made sure he was at the very back, so that maybe the lesson would end before he got to the front. Achilles was sure to hate him – werewolves were the very definition of untrustworthy.

"Approach him slowly, and don't avoid eye contact. If he tries to go for you he'll use his claws, so keep alert... there we go, he'll let you stroke him now, nice and gently..."

As the queue shortened, the professor continued talking, giving them encouragement and interesting facts, interwoven with his own anecdotes. Remus didn't know what Ferox had done before becoming a teacher, but he'd certainly had some adventures – travelled everywhere, it sounded like.

Finally, Remus was at the front of the queue. He felt frozen to the spot, looking at the yellow eyed animal nervously,

"Come on then – what was your name?" Professor Ferox beckoned him forward. Remus didn't move.

"Remus Lupin. I'm not... um... cats don't tend to like me." He mumbled.

"Achilles is not a cat." The teacher said, still smiling. "Come on Lupin, up you come."

Remus sighed heavily and approached. He didn't want someone as cool as Ferox to think he was a

wuss. Achilles watched him walk forward. It did look very intelligent, there was something in the eyes, even though it had a very ugly snubbed nose. He reached his hand out, allowing the kneazle to sniff at him. Its claws weren't out, but Remus was willing to bet they were very long and very sharp. He'd been scratched by cats before and had never really liked them. "Very good," Professor Ferox was saying, "Now, a bit closer and give him a stroke, go on."

Swallowing hard, Remus obeyed, ready to jump back if he had to. But Achilles did not need to mind that he was a werewolf. Instead, he actually began to purr as Remus rubbed him tentatively behind the ear, closing its eyes and looking completely docile. "There we are!" Professor Ferox cheered, delighted, "Excellent judges of character, kneazles. Now, we haven't long left, so if you'll all just make a note of the homework..."

Remus stroked Achilles for a little bit longer. The creature seemed to be enjoying it so much that he felt bad for stopping.

"That was good, wasn't it?" Marlene chatted, as they left their first lesson, "I hope he always brings things in for us to look at."

"Not going to be very practical when we get to the XXXXX creatures." Remus said.

"Maybe he'll bring Achilles in again, though," Marlene replied, hopefully.

"Who cares about his cat!" Mary nudged her, "He's bloody gorgeous."

"Yeah," Marlene giggled, "I wonder if he's single?"

Remus sighed, and began to lag behind the girls. They were a nightmare when they got onto the topic of boys, and it was best to stay out of their way before they started waxing lyrical about James and Sirius. He began to daydream as they meandered in the direction of the great hall for lunch.

It had been a better lesson than he'd expected, and even though Ferox hadn't given him any house points, he had essentially said that Remus had a trustworthy character. No one had ever said anything like that before, and it made him feel unusually pleased with himself, a peaceful feeling that carried on through lunch, into their Potions lesson later that day, and was still going strong that night as he drifted off to sleep. He dreamed of lions.

Third Year: The Hogwarts Black Market

Chapter Summary

Remus begins his career as a thirteen-year-old cigarette mogul.

Wednesday 12th September 1973

“Ugh, go back to bed, Lupin!” Sirius threw a shoe at him from his bed.

“Sorry!” Remus cringed, guiltily, as he quickly pulled the curtains shut, throwing the room back into darkness. It was 5AM, and he was *awake*. More awake than he’d ever felt in his life.

He crept downstairs, not wanting to disturb anyone else, clutching a shoebox under one arm. With a brand new book to read, Remus set up camp in the most comfortable armchair in the deserted common room. He often came down early, on mornings like this, when his body simply refused to sleep and he had so much energy he thought he could run laps around the castle without breaking a sweat. Remus had never actually tried this – if anything, he tried to push the strange urge away, lock it up and focus on his mind instead.

Still, he struggled to concentrate on his book. He thought about going for a walk, but they weren’t really allowed out of bounds until breakfast began at six. *Ugh*, he had to try not to think about breakfast, or his stomach would start growling. Never mind that he’d had three helpings of mashed potato with his beef stew last night. Even Peter had looked impressed.

Even if it *was* time for breakfast, he’d said he would be in the common room for an hour from six thirty onwards. This was the ideal time, he had decided – no one expected you to be up to anything nefarious that early in the morning, and the other marauders typically didn’t get up until seven thirty, even on weekdays. Sirius would stay in bed longer if he possibly could. James sometimes got up for an early morning broom practice, but not usually until after seven.

Remus looked down at the shoebox in his lap. He could cast a quick misdirection charm if James came down sooner than expected, that wouldn’t be too difficult. Mind you, the state his magic was in at the moment he’d better not do it while the box was in his lap – or he ran the risk of vanishing something much more vital. He’d already been to Madam Pomfrey once this term, attempting to grow his hair out in Transfiguration. He’d needed Peter and James to help him carry his rapidly growing locks to the hospital wing – Sirius had been laughing too hard to be of any use at all.

Remus experimented levitating his book, but it shot up to the ceiling, smacking it hard before plummeting towards the floor. He sighed. He could do nothing but sit still and wait, it seemed. He wished he could have the record player on – Sirius had left it in the common room along with his newest albums from Andromeda – *Aladdin Sane*, and *Led Zeppelin IV*. Sirius had been listening to ‘Black Dog’ on repeat for weeks now.

Remus opened the shoe box and took a quick inventory, though it was unnecessary; this would be his first sale. If anyone came. He’d spoken to a few fifth years he’d seen smoking the year before, and got them interested. They seemed to be under some impression that ‘muggle fags’ were somehow more potent, or maybe just more exotic than wizarding ones. He did nothing to discourage the idea, and told them to spread the word.

Sirius had once obtained an exhaustive list of all the Hogwarts school rules, suggesting that they attempt to break every one before they reached seventh year. Remus read through it and had found nothing that mentioned tobacco trafficking. Not if you took the language very literally, anyway. Besides, it wasn't going to be a regular thing – he only had the stuff he'd brought with him.

He had planned to give it all a bit more thought, to wait until after the full moon, but then he found out that their first Hogsmeade weekend was coming up on the 15th and he'd decided he needed to get a move on.

Sirius and James had already planned the trip out in full, without consulting Peter or Remus, who were just happy to trail after them as usual. Honeyduke's, obviously, and Zonko's to stock up on dung bombs. Then the shrieking shack, because James's dad didn't believe it was haunted, which meant James didn't either, and Sirius wanted to prove them both wrong. Then they were very keen to have Remus try something called *butterbeer*.

Remus had his own plans. He was going to tell them that a long-lost aunt had died, and left him a very small amount of money. This would hopefully be enough of an explanation to satisfy James, who was certain to ask where Remus had acquired his newfound wealth. Remus felt sure that petty crime, even in the muggle world, was not something James took lightly. Sirius might shrug it off, having little regard for rules in any setting – but he would probably also try to lend Remus some of his own money, which defeated the whole point.

“Lupin? That you?”

A sixth year had come down the stairs from the boy's dormitories, still looking bleary eyed, clutching a NEWT textbook.

“Yeah,” Remus sat up straighter in the armchair, roused from his daydream.

“Great, um... did you say five sickles for a pack of twenty?”

“That's right.” Remus opened his box, quickly, gesturing the sixth year over.

They made the swap and the sixth year scurried out of the portrait hole, probably off for a morning fag before the library. The little silver coins rattled heavy in Remus's hand and he grinned to himself. He was selling everything for twice the market rate, but if people were willing to pay...

He made two more sales to some fifth years, and to a seventh year girl who bought a packet of loose tobacco and asked if he had anything ‘more fun’ for sale. He was a bit confused by what she meant. And just repeated that he only had pre-rolled and loose. She shrugged,

“I'll ask Martha Ebhurst in Hufflepuff, she's usually got good stuff.”

Remus nodded, still not really sure what she meant. Either way, it appeared that he was not the only student in school with an entrepreneurial mind.

By quarter past seven, Remus's shoebox was half empty and his pockets jangling. Deeply satisfied, he packed everything away as the common room filled up with students beginning their days.

“Wotcher Remu,” James came bounding down the stairs, broom in hand, just as Remus was heading up them, “You're up early.”

“Yeah, couldn't sleep.” Remus replied evasively. Fortunately, James was eager to get out to the quidditch pitch and didn't pay any attention to the shoebox, or the strange clinking sound Remus's robes were making.

“See you for lunch?” He called, already halfway across the room,

“Yep.” Remus nodded, hurrying on his way back upstairs.

In the dorm room, Peter was in the shower and Sirius was still asleep, covers thrown over his head, the only part of him visible was his black hair spilling out on the white pillow. Remus crept silently over to his bed and deposited his money and his goods, before collecting together his books for the day.

James had obviously yanked back the curtains before leaving, and – Remus thought with some annoyance – had not received the same rebuke from Sirius that he had. There was enough light for him to neatly sort through his homework and carefully stow it in his bag. He’d done all the work that was due for the next few days, unsure how much time Madam Pomfrey would make him stay off lessons. He hoped not too long – he’d asked James to make a note of the homework for their shared classes, but he’d be missing Care of Magical Creatures and Runes too. He couldn’t very well ask any of the girls to get the right notes for him, not without them asking where he’d be.

His stomach rumbled again. He wondered if James was having breakfast right now. Potter often ate food on the go, always rushing off to one place or another. The bathroom door creaked open and Peter peered around the door, hair still wet and cheeks pink from the shower. He waved, and mouthed ‘morning, Moony’. Remus raised a hand in response.

Peter looked at Sirius – who was still just a lump in the duvet – anxiously, before tiptoeing carefully over to his own bed to fetch his tie. Remus watched with some amusement as Peter attempted to gather his things without making so much as a sound. There was a fine line, Remus thought, between showing respect for your dorm mates sleeping habits, and just being a complete and utter wuss.

It was mean of him, but Remus was feeling particularly wicked, that morning. Blame it on the moon. He pulled his wand slowly from his pocket, and waved it very slightly, whispering under his breath.

In an instant, Peter’s book bag slid off the end of his bed, landing with a heavy thud which reverberated off the bedroom’s stone walls, rattling the window panes. Wide eyed, Peter froze, going pale. He shot a look at Sirius, who was stirring, and practically fled from the room, leaving his tie behind.

Remus wheezed with laughter, having to sit down on his own bed, clutching his stomach. When he opened his eyes, still catching his breath, Sirius was wide awake, still lying in bed, propped up on one elbow, staring at Remus as if he was mad.

“You did that on purpose, didn’t you?”

Remus shrugged and nodded, standing up again and returning to his pile of homework. Sirius threw a pillow at him.

“Knob.”

“What? Pete looked like such a prat tiptoeing around you, couldn’t help myself.”

“Not very gallant of you, picking on the weak, Moony,” Sirius yawned and stretched.

“He’s fine,” Remus waved a dismissive hand, “I’ll take him his tie. Anyway, someone had to get you up, c’mon, it’s breakfast.”

Sirius yawned again.

“Bring me something up.”

“No.”

“James would,” Sirius whined.

“James isn’t here.”

“*Peter* would.”

“As we’ve established,” Remus said, hoisting his book bag up onto his shoulder, “Peter’s a coward.”

Sirius groaned and leaned back.

“Fine, I’ll get up. Wait for me?”

“I’m hungry.” Remus complained.

“I won’t take long! Just treat it as penance for waking me up.”

“You threw a shoe at me, this morning.”

“Did I hit you?”

“No.”

“Well then.” Sirius got out of bed, grabbing his uniform. “Serves you right anyway, getting up at stupid o’clock.”

“Couldn’t sleep.” Remus said, “I think it’s the moon.”

Sirius stopped outside the bathroom door. He looked at Remus with something a bit like pity – if Sirius Black even had it in him to feel sorry for anyone but himself. Remus regretted saying anything – he didn’t want pity, he rarely brought up the full moon for exactly that reason.

“Sorry, Lupin.” Sirius said, “Is it... I mean, do you worry about it?”

“No, it’s not like that,” Remus said, hurriedly, “I just get restless. Hungry too, so hurry up.” He laughed, lightly, to show that everything was fine. Sirius smirked, disappearing into the bathroom.

“You ought to be grateful, Moony,” he called from inside, turning on the shower, “Not many Gryffindor’s would be able to lie-in when they know they’re sharing a room with a restless werewolf.”

“Wanker.” Remus called back.

* * *

Thursday 13th September 1973

He woke up upstairs, which was unusual. There were mice in the house, he knew that because he often saw them before he transformed. Perhaps once he turned he chased them, but he didn’t think he ever caught any. Three of his fingers were broken, but at least his shoulders hadn’t dislocated –

that had already happened twice this year.

Before moving, Remus made a series of mental checks from top to toe. What hurt? How *much* did it hurt? Was he numb anywhere? Did all his limbs move when he wanted them too? No, it seemed all right. A few scratches, none too deep. He'd got off easily. Perhaps the wolf was happy to be back at Hogwarts too.

He got up from the floor and limped over to the window. Sometimes his knees got a bit out of joint, but this morning they were only sore. He tried to squint through the gaps in the boards, but it was no good. The house was sealed up tight.

"Remus, dear?" Madam Pomfrey's voice drifted up the stairs,

"Coming," he croaked back, hoarsely. His clothes were downstairs, so he ripped an old blanket from the bed with his good hand and wrapped it around himself. It smelled of mildew and dead things.

* * *

"What have I told you boys? He can't have visitors on the first day!" Madam Pomfrey's scolding interrupted his dreams. Remus blinked, yawning. The hospital was dimly lit, curtains drawn. It must be evening already. His stomach grumbled. He wondered if he'd eaten anything yet, or if the nurse had let him sleep instead. He lost so much time, after a transformation – like his bones, nothing seemed to fit together quite right.

"It's been *almost* a day," Peter's voice now. "We brought him chocolate."

"Well that's very nice of you, dear," Madam Pomfrey's voice softened a little. She wasn't a natural disciplinarian. "But Mr Lupin is sleep—"

"I'd love some chocolate," he called out, hoping they could hear him. His throat felt raw.

The curtain whipped back to reveal Peter, James and Sirius standing there, looking triumphant.

"Hiya, Moony!" James and Sirius chorused, plonking themselves down at the end of the bed, either side of his ankles.

"Here you go," Peter dropped three chocolate frogs into his lap.

"Cheers!"

"Well if you're up anyway," Madam Pomfrey sighed, "I'll go and fetch you some proper food. Half an hour, boys, that's *all*."

"Here's your homework, you big weirdo." James pulled some parchment from his bag, handing it over,

"Thanks James, you're a lifesaver." Remus put it on his bedside table for later.

"And here's the rest of it," Sirius handed him some more. "I had to wait outside your Care of Magical Creatures class for half of lunch, so you'd better get top marks on that."

"You did?!" Remus stared at Sirius, amazed. Sirius nodded, imperiously,

"I did. Got to say, too, bit jealous of you. Looks like a really interesting subject, wish I wasn't stuck doing Divination."

“But what about *me*?!” James said, gasping dramatically.

“I see plenty of you.” Sirius retorted, giving him a shove.

“Such a fickle heart.” James sighed, making large eyes at Sirius, so that Peter began to giggle uncontrollably. Sirius shoved James again, and James leapt at him, pulling him into a headlock and tussling Sirius’s hair.

“Oi, Moony,” Peter said, suddenly, “Arbella Fenchurch gave me this for you,” he set down a handful of sickles. “She said you knew what it was for?”

“Er... yeah, cheers Pete.” Remus hurriedly tried to gather up the coins and hide them under his pillow. “I um... I had this chocolate frog card she really wanted. Aglaonike of Thessaly.”

“Oh I wanted that one!” Peter looked hurt. Remus shrugged,

“Sorry mate. Money talks.”

Third year: Hogsmeade

Saturday 15th September 1972

“Pack your cloak, James.”

“Why?”

“You never know, do you?”

“Fine, but I doubt we’ll want it.”

“Don’t forget you owe me a galleon on that bet we had.”

“I haven’t,” James returned, patiently, “Just relax for a minute, will you?”

“Never.” Sirius grinned back, “You do realise that this is the most excitement I’ve had in months? I wasn’t even allowed to go to Diagon Alley this summer.”

“You had more going on than I did,” James replied, resentfully, “You at least had all that betrothal drama. My family’s so boring.”

“Shut up, Potter, your family’s amazing and you know it. I definitely had the worst summer.”

“I had a great time in France.” Peter piped up, but no one paid him much attention.

“What about you, Moony?” James asked, as they wended their way down the stairs into the common room. A gang of excited third years was waiting, ready for their first trip to the village. They were watched over with a fond sort of nostalgia by the older students.

“What about me?” Remus asked, pushing away flashbacks to the summer, the memory of wriggling through a tiny bathroom window and landing hard on his knees on the tile below.

“How was your summer? You haven’t told us anything.”

“Nothing to tell.” Remus said. “More boring than both of yours – no magic. I just read.”

“Well you’re all coming to mine for Christmas.” James said, cheerfully. They began to file out of the common room and head towards the front entrance. “Same as last year, yeah? Moon’s on the tenth of December, so we don’t even have to worry about that.”

Remus gaped,

“How do you know when it is?” He hadn’t even looked that far ahead yet.

“Told you, we were bored other the summer,” Sirius elbowed him, “We looked it up, for the next few years.”

“But... why?!” Remus was torn between feeling very touched, and somewhat violated. It wasn’t for *them* to worry about. It was his own private problem, and always had been.

“It’s like quidditch.” James said – whenever anything was important to him he compared it to quidditch -- “You’ve got to know your team’s weaknesses in order to work to their strengths.”

“If you say so.” Remus replied, glumly, not wanting to talk about it much more. He had hoped that once they knew about his condition there would be no more researching it behind his back. That they could all just get on with things in the way he preferred – which was to ignore the problem completely.

The trouble was, nothing was private when it came to James and Sirius – your whole life was up for grabs. Remus still wasn’t used to this – as hard as he tried to keep up, there were just some things he would never want to share. It was all very well if you were James, and had open parents who talked to you and listened to you in return. Or Sirius, who was so outgoing and almost entirely shameless.

“Look who it is,” Sirius nudged James, pointing at a dark figure waiting in the archway entrance. Lily pushed past the marauders and went to meet him. Snape.

“Why are they even friends?!” James ran his hands through his hair distractedly.

“They grew up in the same town,” Remus said, as they carried on, watching the couple ahead, talking animatedly; one red head, one black.

“How’d you know?” James rounded on him, looking affronted.

“She told me.”

“You fancy her, then?” James asked, clearly struggling to know how to react. Remus rolled his eyes,

“No. We just chat.” he said, firmly. “And if *you* fancy her, then you might want to try it.”

He’d noticed this sort of talk creeping into their conversations lately. Sometimes he had to double check he was talking to the marauders and not Marlene and Mary – ‘*he fancies her*’, ‘*she fancies so-and-so*,’ – and on and on. To make matters worse, Avni Chaudhry, a Gryffindor third year, was now going out with Ravenclaw fourth year Matthew Studt, and no one had talked about anything else for days; everyone seemed to have an opinion on it. It was mind numbingly boring stuff to Remus, for whom (aside from a few exceptions) girls were still generally incomprehensible.

“She likes you, though.” James said. “You did all your revision together last term.”

“Only because you lot couldn’t be arsed,” Remus replied defensively. They were approaching the town now, a cluster of pretty stone buildings sat just below them. “And it’s not like we were alone, Mary and Marlene were there too.”

“We all need to take notes from Moony,” Sirius teased, “Birds follow him everywhere. How’d you do it, Lupin? Those big brown eyes of yours?”

James and Peter snickered, but Remus ignored him, walking a little bit ahead, hands in his pockets, still limping slightly from his last transformation. That was an utterly ridiculous suggestion, especially when it was obvious to anyone with eyes that Sirius was the best-looking boy in the year.

It was clearer than ever, now that they were all getting taller, growing from childhood into adolescence. James had a certain amount of swagger; that came with wealth and skill on the quidditch pitch, but Sirius was always going to be in another league entirely. Remus hadn’t decided whether to be jealous about it or not, and tried not to think about it too much.

When they finally reached Hogsmeade, Remus could not be more relieved. The village looked like

the sort of place Remus had previously thought only existed in children's books. The cobbled streets gleamed in the yellow mid-September sunshine, and the higgledy-piggledy rows of black beamed Tudor cottages might as well have been made of gingerbread and spun sugar.

"Honeyduke's?" James said.

"Honeyduke's." The others responded, in unison.

Remus had never entered the sweet shop through the front door before, nor had he ever been on the shop floor. It was packed to the rafters with boxes, jars and bags of every kind of confection imaginable. Great trees of brightly coloured lollipops, as large as pinwheels, slabs of chocolate the size of paving stones; piles and piles of glittering sugar mice.

The shop was also packed with Hogwarts students, and the marauders had to push and squeeze to even get close to the goods. They filled their basket with enough sweets to last them until Christmas, at least, before queuing for the till, manned by a very harassed looking wizard with white hair. Remus realised that this was probably Mr Honeyduke, and wondered whether the shopkeeper knew there was a secret tunnel in his cellar.

After that, their next stop was Zonko's, the joke shop, which was just as busy as Honeyduke's, and one of the noisiest places Remus had ever been. Every few seconds something seemed to explode, pop, or start whistling somewhere in the shop, accompanied by the delighted laughter or horrified shrieks of students. James and Sirius were clearly old hands at practical joke shopping, and made an efficient sweep of the premises, weighing up the benefits and downsides of each contraption like a pair of bankers at the stock exchange. Half an hour later and they were finally leaving, weighted down with bags full of dungbombs, trick wands, exploding inkwells, hiccup sweets and bars of frog spawn soap.

Remus thought they had perhaps been a little short-sighted doing all their shopping first, because next James and Sirius wanted to visit the Shrieking Shack, which meant leaving the main high street and facing an uphill climb, goods in tow.

"So, what is this place, again?" Remus huffed as he struggled up the hill, his knee and hip still bothering him.

"Haunted house," James replied, taking two of Remus's heaviest shopping bags from him without a word. "Most haunted place in Britain, dad says."

"It's not haunted!" Sirius called from up ahead, "You Potters are just superstitious."

"I heard that the ghosts there are really nasty," Peter said, anxiously, struggling almost as much as Remus was with the steep incline. "Worse than Peeves."

"Are they poltergeists, then?" Remus asked, curious – he'd been planning to do some reading about spirituous apparitions when he got the chance, after learning that it had been his father's main area of study.

"Think so," James said, "The locals say they hear screaming coming from the house some nights."

"Only for a few years, though," Sirius countered, "Poltergeists don't just move in at a moment's notice. There would have to be decades and decades of disturbance and negative energy building up to—"

"Oh my god."

Lupin stopped still and almost dropped the bags he was still holding. He had looked up at the house for the first time, and a cold chill struck the pit of his stomach.

“What’s up Moony? Want me to take your other bags?” James was asking.

Remus shook his head, speechless, he couldn’t tear his eyes away. He’d never seen it from the outside before; they always came through the tunnel. But he knew the shade of the wood, he knew what the boarded windows looked like.

“Bloody hell, if it is haunted, then I think Moony’s been possessed.” Sirius said, sounding like he was only half-joking. “Oi, Lupin. You’re being weird, stop it.”

“That’s...” Remus struggled to find the words. He closed his eyes and tried to take a few breaths. “That’s the house. Where they put me.”

James seemed to understand at once, and put a hand on Remus’s shoulder in a brotherly sort of way.

“Ok, c’mon, it’s time to go.” He said.

No one said anything as they began to trudge back downhill, towards the town. Remus looked at the ground ahead the whole time, concentrating on putting one foot in front of the other and getting as far away from the shack as he could. *The Shrieking Shack*. Shrieking. He felt sick. James steered them in the direction of a quaint looking pub. Inside there were lots of tables and comfortable chairs, not a far cry from the Gryffindor common room. They found seats in a quiet corner, and Remus sat, gratefully, his joints very sore now. James went to the bar, and Sirius and Peter sat quietly either side of Remus.

“So... on the full moon, that’s where you go?” Peter asked. Remus nodded, fiddling with a damp beer mat on the table. “It’s not haunted, then?” Peter continued.

“Nope. Just me.”

“So, wait, the shrieking is...”

“Me.”

“But why—”

“Shut up, Pettigrew.” Sirius snarled, suddenly. Remus looked at him, taken aback.

James returned with four bottles of amber liquid and set them down, taking his own seat.

“Butterbeer!” He said, brightly, pushing one towards Remus, “Try it, Moony, you’ll love it.”

Remus raised the glass to his lips. He was still feeling a bit queasy, and the concoction in the bottle smelled very syrupy – but he found that sweet things usually helped if he’d had a shock. He took a sip, and felt instantly warmed by the delicious liquid. He smiled at James, hoping they wouldn’t ask any more questions.

They didn’t. Instead they spent a very pleasant afternoon drinking butterbeer and planning how best to utilise their new practical joke arsenal. Peter had the unusually brilliant idea of casting a remote timer spell on the dungbombs, so that they could be triggered at anytime from anywhere in the castle.

“Excellent diversionary tactic,” James exclaimed, excited, “Think of what we could get away with if Filch was chasing dung bombs on the opposite side of the building!”

“Give us time to work on the map a bit more, too.” Remus added.

“You’re not seeing the big picture.” Sirius folded his arms, leaning back on his chair. “We could set them all to go off at the same time. Imagine! We’ve probably got enough here to hide one in every classroom – total chaos!” Sirius looked so enraptured when he said this, that the other three were completely taken in, nodding furiously.

“Oh, let’s not sit here, Lily, it doesn’t look very clean.” A nasty, bitter voice interrupted them, “They allow in all sorts, clearly.”

Sirius snapped forward on his chair, glaring at Snape, who was hovering next to a nearby table.

“Don’t be silly, Sev, it’s fine.” Lily shook her head, pulling out a seat.

“Alright, Evans?” James waved at her, compulsively, getting that stupid look on his face.

“Leave us alone, will you, Potter?” Lily tossed her hair, “Hiya, Remus.”

“Hi,” he waved at her, grinning. He couldn’t help enjoying the way she treated the marauders, she was the only one who didn’t fawn over them.

“Eurgh,” Sirius said, holding his nose, looking at Snape, “What is that *smell*? Potter, did you trail something in on your shoe?”

James sniggered,

“Smells more like a dung bomb’s gone off.”

“Disgusting,” Sirius smirked, “Maybe we should open a window.”

Snape had gone white with rage. Lily put a hand on his arm,

“Just ignore them, Sev, they’re idiots.”

But Severus would not let Sirius have the last word.

“How’s the family, Black?” He asked, his voice wheedling, insidious. Sirius’s mouth formed a hard line. Snape continued, “Regulus was telling everyone you had quite an exciting summer. *So* exciting, in fact, that you’re no longer welcome back, hm?”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, Snivellus.” Sirius spat. Remus knew that it was too late now – Sirius had engaged, and there would be no going back.

“Don’t I?” Snape raised an eyebrow, clearly thrilled at the reaction he had elicited. “Had any post from mummy this year, Black? Heard *anything at all* from *any* of your relatives?”

Sirius had a very odd look on his face. Remus had the impression that he was realising something for the first time, and trying not to let Severus see it. James looked concerned, no longer laughing.

“Ignore him, mate,” he said, quietly, “He’s a prick, ignore him.”

“I’m right, then,” Severus’s thin lips curved into a nasty smile, “No wonder you follow Potter around like a lovesick girl, when your own family don’t want anything to do with you. When

you've been disowned like that, I suppose all that's left is to associate with the dregs of society..." He cast his black-eyed gaze over Peter and Remus.

Sirius stood up, knocking his chair back. His wand was in his hand; he must have reached for it while Snape was talking. Remus stood too, his aching bones forgotten as he clenched his fists, ready to beat Severus senseless, if Sirius gave the word.

"Sirius, don't!" James went to snatch his wand away – they weren't allowed to perform magic in Hogsmeade.

"C'mon, Severus, let's go," Lily had stood up too and was tugging her friend's sleeve. She looked furious with him, which was a small comfort to Remus.

"No." Sirius said, his voice unnervingly steady and authoritative. "We're leaving. C'mon, lads, I can't take this stench much longer."

They did as ordered, even James, who only threw one longing look back at Lily on their way out.

"That was... really mature," Potter said, scratching his head as they stepped out of the pub into the warm evening light. Sirius snorted, starting off back to Hogwarts.

"It's not over." He said, fiercely, the others jogging to catch up with his purposeful strides. "I'll show him. I'll bloody destroy him!"

The marauders were at war.

Third Year: Noble and Most Ancient

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*Cold fire, you've got everything but cold fire
You will be my rest and peace, child
I moved up to take a place
Near you*

*So tired, it's the sky that makes you feel tried
It's a trick to make you see wide
It can all but break your heart.*

Saturday 15th September 1973

Knock knock

“Sirius.”

Nothing.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

“Sirius?”

Silence.

“Oh, for the love of... Sirius Orion Black the Third, I know you’re in there!” James hammered on the door.

“Piss off, Potter.”

James stepped back from the bathroom door and sat on his bed, looking dejected. Sirius had not joined them for dinner, and had been locked in the bathroom now for two hours, without making a sound.

“Leave him alone,” Remus said, turning the page of his book. He lay belly down on his own bed, pretending he wasn’t at all concerned. “He’ll come out when he’s ready.”

That was something he’d often heard Matron say. At least once a week, one of the St Edmund’s boys – usually a new kid – had a tantrum and locked himself in a room, or crawled into some small space so no one could reach him. The response from staff was always the same; ignore it until he realises no one cares; until he realises that nothing he can do will make a difference. It always worked, Remus knew this first hand.

“It’s not like him,” James said, obviously disregarding Remus’s draconian tactic. “I could kill Snape, y’know. For saying that stuff.”

Remus shrugged,

“Black already hates his family, though. I dunno why he lets Snivellus bother him about it.”

James stared at Remus, dumbfounded, as if he had just said something unimaginably cruel.

“They’re still his *family*, Moony.”

“They’re horrible to him.”

“Doesn’t mean he doesn’t care what they think.” James sighed. “Look, Lupin, maybe you’d better go before he comes out. Go and find Pete in the library or something.”

“I’m Sirius’s friend too!” Remus sat up, indignantly.

“Yeah, yeah, of course you are,” James waved a hand, “But well... if he’s been crying, I think he’d rather no one else saw.”

“I don’t care if he’s crying. I want to help.”

This was a bit of a lie. Remus had always felt uncomfortable around crying people – he never knew what to do with himself. But he really did want to help, too. Hadn’t he *always* tried to help?

More than ever Remus wanted to come clean about having prompted Narcissa into the unbreakable vow, just to see James’s face. But he calmed himself. It wasn’t a competition, and even if it was, it wasn’t one he would win.

“Ok,” James said, “but you have to be understanding about it. You can’t start a fight.”

“What are you talking about?” Remus was mortally offended. He never started fights.

“You two! You’re always bickering, I swear.”

“We do *not* bicker.” Remus snapped. James just raised his eyebrows, which was infuriating.

The dark-haired boy hopped off the bed once more and went back to the bathroom door.

“Sirius?” He knocked, “Please come out and talk to us?”

“Get lost, Potter, leave me alone.”

James sighed again. Remus, annoyed with James now just as much as he was annoyed with Sirius, got up too, and strode over to the door. Indicating for James to move, he rapped hard on the wood himself.

“I said piss o—”

“Sirius, it’s me.” Remus said, his voice hard and cold, like Matron’s. “Look, if you’re going to mope about like a big jessie then at least let us in so we can start planning our revenge?”

Silence.

Remus tutted, “Fine, sulk. But you’re being a selfish git. You know, you’re not the only one whose family hates you.”

“Remus!” James exclaimed, scandalised. Remus shrugged. It was worth a try.

There was a shuffling noise inside the bathroom. Remus pressed his ear to the door, then reeled back as it opened. Sirius’s gloomy face peered out.

“Finally,” James said, relieved, “Look, come out and—”

“Moony can come in.” Sirius said, opening the door just wide enough for Remus to squeeze inside, then slamming it back and fixing the lock.

It was dark inside.

“*Lumos*,” Remus muttered. His wand point lit up, casting a pale glow over the small white room, and Sirius’s pale face. He had been crying, his eyes were dark and red. Remus looked away quickly, glancing up at the light fittings. The bulbs were smashed. He tutted, “You and your temper, eh?” He said, “*Reparo*.”

The lights mended and flickered back on. Remus extinguished his wand light.

“Didn’t do it on purpose,” Sirius sniffed, wiping his nose with the back of his hand. It was a sullen, childish gesture, somehow inappropriate for Sirius who was, even at thirteen, usually the epitome of grace and poise. “I still smash stuff sometimes, when I’m angry. My magic gets out of whack.”

“Oh right,” Remus nodded, though he’d never heard of that before.

“So, revenge?” Sirius asked, sitting down on the toilet lid and looking at Remus expectantly.

“Revenge.” Remus agreed, “What’d you want to do to him?”

“Not just him.” Sirius glowered, “All of them. Every single Slytherin in the school.”

Remus nodded enthusiastically – that sounded a bit bonkers, but it was a start. There would be time to talk him down later, when he was acting less weird and wasn’t in danger of blowing up any more lightbulbs.

“Yeah, we’ll get ‘em all, Black. Now c’mon, let’s go and—”

“I’m not coming out yet.” Sirius said, sulkily, crossing his arms. Remus sighed. He sat on the floor, leaning against the door.

“Ok, fine. Want to talk about it? Because James is probably the best person to—”

“Did you mean what you just said?” Sirius interrupted him again, “Do you think my family hates me?”

“Oh god, *I dunno*, do I? I’m not exactly an authority on families.” Remus rubbed the back of his head. “I was just trying to get you to open the door, to be honest.”

He’d meant it as a joke, but Sirius didn’t smile. He looked down at Remus through a curtain of dark hair.

“You said your family hates you.”

“Well I s’pose they must have,” Remus explained. “Otherwise they wouldn’t... well, I wouldn’t have been sent to St Edmund’s, would I?”

“Doesn’t mean they hated you.”

“No.” Remus reflected, “But I don’t think they can have liked me very much, all the same.”

“You’re not... I mean, it doesn’t bother you?”

Remus shrugged,

“Sometimes, obviously. But, y’know. No one’s entitled to a happy life.” Matron had said that many times. For the first time, saying it out loud, Remus wondered if she was entirely right.

“Blimey, Lupin, you’re a right downer, you know that?”

“You let me in.” Remus kicked Sirius lightly in the shin with the toe of his trainer. “If you want cheering up then I’ll get Potter.”

“Nah,” Sirius shrugged, smiling weakly. “You’re ok.”

Remus laughed,

“James didn’t want me to come in. Said we just bicker.”

“He what?!” Sirius shook his head. “We do *not* bicker.”

“That’s what I said.” Remus assured him.

“My family...” Sirius said, suddenly, “I don’t think they hate me. I think they want to like me, really. But I keep letting everyone down. It’s funny most of the time, but... well, it isn’t today.”

Remus didn’t know what to say to that, so he kept quiet. He thought about Narcissa, vowing to face death if she could not marry Lucius. He thought about Regulus, who often stared at his older brother across the dining hall, green eyed with jealousy. Families were a messy business. Perhaps he ought to be grateful to Lysius Lupin for ending it all in one fell swoop, so that Remus never had to know whether or not he would have made his father proud, or whether he would have been a disappointment after all.

* * *

Friday 5th October 1973

“I’ve got it. I’ve really got it this time.”

“That’s nice, Pete.” Remus replied blithely, reading his Arithmancy textbook.

“We should dye his robes pink.”

“He’d just dye them back, it’s too simple. Where would we even get his robes from?” Remus turned the page and resumed his reading.

“Ouch! Bloody hell, there’s something wrong with that bludger!” Sirius shouted, standing up. “Come on, McKinnon, move your bloomin’ arse!”

“Do you mind leaving her arse out of it?” Mary snapped, from a few rows up.

They were watching the Gryffindor quidditch practice. Well, Sirius, Peter and Mary were. Remus had just wanted to get on with his reading.

“Jealous, MacDonald?” Sirius replied, cheekily.

“Dye his hair pink, then,” Peter persisted, shaking Remus’s arm for attention, “I’ve learnt colour changing spells now, I can do it.”

“So can he.” Remus said, jerking his arm back and searching for his place on the page.

“You know, Moony, you could show a *bit* more interest.” Sirius said.

“In quidditch? Or taking down your arch nemesis?”

“Both. Either.”

“I’m here, aren’t I?” Remus turned another page.

“Who’s your arch nemesis?” Mary asked, getting up and coming down to sit beside Sirius.

“If I told you, I’d have to kill you.” Sirius said, dryly. Mary rolled her eyes,

“Is it Snape?”

All three boys looked at Mary in surprise. She laughed, “Come on, you lot, it’s not exactly a secret – you’ve all had it in for each other since first year. Plus, Lily is one of my best friends.”

“Don’t talk to me about Evans.” Sirius groaned, “I hear enough as it is.”

“I think she’s an idiot, going around with that creep.” Mary said, rubbing her arms as if just the thought of Severus made her skin crawl. “You know he made Marlene cry the other day? Called her dad something really nasty. Makes no sense, either, because Lily says *he’s* half-blood, Severus... anyway, someone needs to teach him a lesson.”

“Ha!” Sirius barked, “He’s half-blood?! Brilliant.”

“Yeah.” Mary said, coolly. “So’s Remus. And I’m muggle born. So what?”

Remus finally looked up from his book to smirk at Sirius, raising an eyebrow at him. Sirius looked down, then back at the quidditch.

“Nothing,” he muttered, “I’m not like that.”

“Good.” Mary said, primly. “I get enough of that shit from Slytherins.”

Remus was inclined to agree with Mary, who had more backbone than he did, putting Sirius in his place like that. Insults from the Slytherins had definitely increased this term, though it might only have been noticeable to non-pure blood students. Remus had started to worry about travelling between classes by himself, though he rarely had to. He’d had a few near misses anyway, and been called a mudblood twice. He didn’t tell James or Sirius this, it seemed a bit like whinging. Plus, as far as insults went, he felt like he’d been called worse than ‘mudblood’.

He didn’t like the idea that it had made Marlene cry, though. It was all very well that Remus got picked on by Snape and Mulciber, or even puny, sadistic little Barty Crouch, but making girls cry was another thing altogether. Remus felt a surge of protectiveness and chivalry towards his friend. He clenched his fists, then unclenched them.

The problem was that Snape wasn’t the type to attack with hexes and big pranks. He could do both of those things, he was every bit as able as the marauders. But Snape relied on words to hurt people – and they were much trickier to counteract.

Unless you changed the words.

“Oh.” Remus put his book down, suddenly. He grabbed Sirius’s arm, “Oh!”

“What?” Sirius frowned at him. He’d been absorbed in watching the training while Remus’s mind had wandered. There had been another opportunity for Sirius to join the quidditch team this year, but he had declined. Maybe because he had changed his mind. Maybe because he didn’t want to be embarrassed in try outs again.

“We change the words!” Remus gabbled, “*We change what he says.*”

“What are you on about?” Sirius clucked his tongue. “Snivellus?”

“Yeah! There are spells you can do to stop someone speaking, right?”

Sirius coloured slightly, looking at Remus.

“Yeah...” he said, cautiously.

“Ok, so how much more difficult can it be to... to like, twist their words? We could set a trigger word – or a few – *mudblood*, or *blood-traitor*, or *half-breed*, *dunglicker*, or... whatever. And instead, we make him say something really nice. Or something stupid. Whatever we feel like.”

“Moony, where did you hear all of those—”

James scored a goal, and Peter leapt up, clapping wildly. Potter did a few loops on his broom, showing off. Sirius grinned up at his friend. Mary’s knee was touching Sirius’s, Remus noticed. They were sitting really close, actually.

“So?” Remus grabbed Sirius’s shoulder again, trying to get him to focus. “What do you think?”

“I love it.” Sirius said, simply. “We should make him say something really ridiculous, like... I dunno, ‘snuggle bunnies’ or something. We’ll go to the library after this, yeah?”

“Can I come?” Mary asked. Sirius shrugged,

“If you want, I s’pose. It’s serious marauder business though.”

Mary giggled. Remus wondered if Sirius found that as annoying as he did. He picked up his book and returned to Arithmancy.

Twenty minutes later, the training session was over and the marauders were walking towards the castle, Mary and Marlene in tow, Sirius and Remus both babbling excitedly to James about their brilliant plan (it had somehow become ‘their’ plan, in Sirius’s mind).

“You’re supposed to be off the pitch by five o’clock.” Someone grunted, in front of them.

Remus looked up to see the Slytherin quidditch team walking towards them, brooms in hand, kits slung over their shoulders.

“We’re leaving now, Bulstrode, bloody hell.” James said, annoyed.

The pug-faced Slytherin captain just scowled at him and pushed past, deliberately knocking James with his shoulder as he did so.

“Oi!” Sirius pulled out his wand. James held him back.

“What’s it to you, Black?” Bulstrode sneered, “If that’s still even your *name*.” The Slytherins all laughed. Including their smallest, newest member, who had been behind the others.

Regulus Black.

It took James and Remus to pull Sirius away, as the Slytherins snickered and whispered.

“Remember the plan,” Remus whispered. Sirius slackened, then nodded.

“Promise me we’ll get *all* of them.” He growled.

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'Prettiest Star' from David Bowie's 'Aladdin Sane' album.

Third Year: The Slug Club

Chapter Summary

The prank progresses, the first gathering of the slug club, and a confrontation.

Monday 8th October 1973

“Sirius, you’d better come up with the replacement words, you’re the most... er...”

“Verbose?” Sirius supplied, yawning. “Loquacious? Garrulous?”

“Exactly,” Remus smiled. “I’ll work on figuring out which spell we’ll need, and James, you can figure out how we actually manage to cast it on the whole house... that’s going to be really hard, I think – Peter, you better help with that.”

“Hark at Moony!” James laughed, buttering his toast, “Giving the orders now.”

“The marauders are a socialist utopia,” Sirius yawned again, “We don’t have leaders.”

“Enjoying Muggle Studies, are you?” Remus raised an eyebrow. Sirius lay his head on the dining table, closing his eyes and flipping two fingers at Remus.

An owl landed on the breakfast table – it was James’s. Sirius’s owl had been confiscated by his parents so many times that he may as well not have one at all, Peter typically relied on the school owls, and Remus never received post anyway.

“What the hell?” James opened the letter proffered by the bird with a frown. “The... slug club?!”

“Oh yeah,” Sirius opened a sleepy eye, “I got one too. Apparently ol’ sluggy likes students who have a certain star quality. So, me, obviously. And I s’pose you too.”

Neither Peter nor Remus received an invitation; but this was not much of a surprise. Peter was quite good at Potions, but lacked aptitude for almost anything else. As for Remus, he tried to fly under the radar where Professor Slughorn was concerned.

“We won’t go then.” James said, folding up his letter decisively. “All for one and one for all, us marauders.”

“I don’t care,” Remus shrugged, “Go if you want to. I bet Lily’s going.”

“Do you!? Yeah, she is really good at Potions, isn’t she?” James said, getting that funny look on his face again, “She’s really good at everything, probably the cleverest in the year—”

“Oi!” Remus and Sirius said, in unison. James raised an eyebrow,

“Cleverest *girl*, then.”

Sirius closed his eyes once more, satisfied, and attempted to doze through the rest of breakfast.

Thursday 11th October 1973

The party was held later that week. James, still uneasy about the exclusion of the two lesser marauders, tried to convince Peter and Remus to don the invisibility cloak and come anyway. Sirius thought this sounded like a good laugh, but Remus personally thought it beneath him. He had no desire to be among the chosen few. In the end, Peter declined too, though he had clearly been on the cusp of agreeing to the ridiculous scheme.

Anyway, Thursdays were Remus's favourite day of the school week. Specifically, Thursdays from 2pm to 4pm – that slot in his timetable allotted to Care of Magical Creatures. Their Wednesday lessons were always theory based, and Remus liked those too; he'd never heard anyone talk about biology like Professor Ferox. But Thursdays were given over to practical lessons, and the class would walk out onto the grounds, or else arrive at the classroom to find a new creature waiting for them, Ferox bright with excitement to show them.

After kneazles, they'd seen doxies and crups. This week was murtlaps. Mary and Marlene squealed at the creatures Ferox presented in a large hutch-like run at the back of the classroom. Remus couldn't blame them – murtlaps were extremely unappealing. They were rat-like creatures, with masses of writhing tentacles sprouting from their backs like maggots.

"We can't do crups and kneazles every week," Ferox grinned, gesturing for them all to gather around, "Not all of the magical creatures we learn about will be cute. But diversity is the spice of life, hm?"

"I hope we don't have to touch them," Marlene whispered, shuddering.

Remus didn't mind – they were gross, but he didn't mind gross things. He had a pretty strong stomach; Professor Ferox had already told him so, last week when they were watching the doxy eggs hatch. Remus had beamed with pride all day long.

Ferox was looking at Remus now,

"Mr Lupin, I'm sure I can rely on you to tell me the beneficial properties of murtlap tentacles?"

Remus tried not to smile too broadly, or look too much like a goody goody.

"They're really good for soothing superficial cuts and abrasions," he said, promptly, "And if you eat them, they make you impervious to most common hexes."

"Excellent, five points to Gryffindor."

Remus couldn't help smiling a bit. Who cared about the stupid slug club. Slughorn was nowhere near as cool as Ferox; Ferox was clever and unpretentious and funny, and did dangerous things. Remus had never given much thought to having a career, but for some weeks now he had been entertaining the idea that whatever he did when he grew up, he would like to be just like Professor Ferox.

Mind you, he'd have to start eating more, or weight training or something, because if Ferox was anything, he was broad. And Remus, though he was inches above the other marauders now in height, remained eternally weedy.

"It's your metabolism." Madam Pomfrey told him, when he'd asked one morning after a moon. "You could eat more, or rest more, but it may just be one of those things, I'm afraid. I shouldn't worry, dear, you're as healthy as can be expected."

That didn't sound all that reassuring, but he accepted it. His father had been thin too, he was sure. At least he wasn't pudgy, like Peter, who still looked like a little boy compared to the rest of them.

This fact was made even clearer later that evening, when Sirius and James stood fully dressed in their formal robes, looking every inch the young lords of the manor, and Peter sat staring at them enviously from his bed, already in his pyjamas.

"D'you think there'll be dancing?" Sirius asked, anxiously, straightening his tie,

"Nah," James replied, desperately trying to comb his hair flat, "We'd have been told to bring partners or something."

Sirius slumped on the bed,

"I hate stuff like this. Moony, you go for me, bet ol' Sluggo won't even notice."

"Fat chance," Remus snorted from behind his copy of *Verbal Assault: Defensive Tongue Twisters*. "Slughorn can't even remember my name half the time. And he'll feel a bit short changed when he's expecting a pureblood Black and gets the half-blood kid he keeps calling *Linchpin*."

"Ugh. He's such a slimy old tosser. Like an actual slug." Sirius smirked to himself and nudged Remus with his elbow, "Heh, an actual slug, Moony."

Remus smiled back, looking up from his book.

"Are you ready, then?" James sighed, tossing away his comb, apparently accepting that his attempt was futile.

"S'pose." Sirius grunted, getting up laboriously.

"I'll come down with you," Remus said, "Might as well go to the library. Wanna come, Pete?"

Peter looked at him as if he was insane, and shook his head.

James, Sirius and Remus made their way down to the common room, where – much to James's glee – Lily was waiting for them in a very pretty turquoise dress. Unfortunately for James, however, as the three marauders approach it became clear that it was not him she was waiting for.

"Remus!" She said, standing up.

"You look nice, Evans," James said, hopefully. Sirius sighed loudly.

"I wanted to speak to *Remus*," Lily said, ignoring James. "Will you walk with me to the party?"

"Not going," Remus shrugged, "Not invited."

"Oh..." Lily flushed a bit, looking embarrassed, "Sorry, I just assumed..."

"What did you want to talk about?" Remus asked, impatiently. His book was heavy, and the full moon was due on Friday, making him more agitated than usual.

Lily eyed James and Sirius, clearly not wanting to say anything in front of them. Remus sighed, "I'm going to the library. If you want to walk that way with me then fine." It would take Lily out of her way, but Remus decided he didn't care. He pushed through the portrait hole and heard her scamper after him, her patent black party shoes clicking on the flagstones.

“What’s the book?” Lily panted, struggling to catch up with Remus’s long-legged stride.

“Nothing.” He said, deliberately covering the title with his arm, “Just some research.”

“It’s not something nasty, is it?” Lily asked, disapprovingly, “It’s not another horrid thing to do to Severus?”

“I knew that’s what you wanted to talk about,” Remus rolled his eyes, still walking.

“Well you have to admit, Sirius did start it that time in Hogsmeade, I mean he called Sev—”

“I don’t care, Lily.” Remus snapped, turning a sharp corner, “He didn’t have to be so nasty, Sirius and James were just having a laugh, and Snape had to go and make it personal.”

“Oh!” Lily stamped her foot, “You’re all as bad as each other!”

“You know he hates people like you, too, don’t you?” Remus countered, stopping now that they were outside the library. He rounded on her, “You know that his sort hate our sort.”

“‘Our sort’,” Lily tutted, “Honestly, this whole blood purity thing is getting ridiculous, and it doesn’t excuse—”

“He made Marlene cry,” Remus persisted, “Mary told us. What do you think he says behind *your* back?”

Lily’s cheeks were pink again,

“Sev would never say anything like that about me! He’s my best friend!”

“Well good for you, but the rest of us aren’t so fortunate.” Remus spat. Lily stared at him, blinking for a few moments, stunned into silence. She looked like she might cry, and Remus felt a tiny twinge of guilt. When she spoke again, her voice was meek and small.

“What are you going to do to him?”

Remus sighed. She might as well know.

“Not just him. All of them.” He said, lowering his voice and bending down slightly in case they were overheard, “And nothing bad. If he stops calling anyone else names, then nothing at all.”

She looked at him, sceptically. He straightened up. “That’s all I’ll say. You’ll be late for your party, go on.”

* * *

Later that evening, Remus thought he had just about cracked it. He was sitting up in the common room and had made his final notes. Now all he needed was Sirius’s list of replacement words and they could begin work on the prank. It was almost eleven o’clock when the portrait hole swung open, and Lily Evans marched in with a face like thunder. There were odd silvery marks on her dress that caught the light as she charged in.

“What’s up, Evans?” Remus asked, tentatively, still feeling a bit sorry for being so short with her outside the library.

“Ask *them*.” She hissed, furious, “I’m going for a shower.”

He did not wonder who she was referring to, but if he had, it was answered within moments, as Sirius and James came through the portrait hole next, laughing hysterically. Remus couldn't help but grin too – their glee was infectious.

“What did you do?”

“It was all Sirius, mate,” James clapped his friend on the back, then bowed to him elaborately, fluttering his hand. Sirius did the same back,

“Couldn't have done it without you, my dear chap.”

“Done *what*?” Remus asked, trying to keep a lid on his irritation as it sprang up out of nowhere.

“Slugs.” James said, “Slugs, bloody everywhere. Started with these little jelly slug sweets that were laid out to eat,”

“Simple enough transfiguration spell,” Sirius shrugged with false modesty, throwing himself into an armchair and slinging one leg over the arm.

“But then,” James sat next to Remus, starry eyed, “Then they started to multiply...”

“And this is why Evans is pissed off with you?”

“Well... did you see the slimy bits on her dress? And um... in her hair a bit too, I think. They were really fast moving slugs, they kind of got everywhere...”

“No sense of humour, that one.” Sirius yawned. “She ought to be thanking us for livening things up a bit.”

“The nerve of some people,” Remus said, dryly.

“See, you understand, Moony,” Sirius grinned, “You'd let us slime you, wouldn't you?”

Remus thought it best to ignore that, and addressed James instead,

“So did Slughorn know it, was you?”

“Yeah, it was pretty obvious. We were the only ones not screaming.”

“Detentions?”

“Three weeks. Cauldron scrubbing. That's fine, helps build up my muscles.” James flexed his arms which, it had to be said, didn't look particularly muscular.

“Good news, though,” Sirius piped up, “No more parties for us – we're out of the slug club.”

“And into the history books!” James crowed, causing all three of them to dissolve into fits of laughter.

Third Year: James Potter and the Lumpy Elephant Dung

Chapter Summary

Words, words, words!

Tuesday 30th October 1973

With Halloween and the traditional Hogwarts feast looming, Remus was keen to have the word-swapping spell perfected in time in order to have maximum reach.

"It's fine, Moony, we all know what we're doing." James said, returning from quidditch practice covered in mud and soaking wet. The evenings were getting darkest and Remus hardly ever went to watch the team practice any more, though Sirius and Peter usually did. Mary always went too, to watch Marlene. She was following them everywhere, these days.

"I just think we should test it," Remus bit his lip, watching Sirius cast a drying spell on James.

"Oh no." Peter said, folding his arms, "I won't be your guinea pig this time. Last time I couldn't get rid of that patch of purple hair for weeks!"

"I'd forgotten about that," Sirius said, dreamily, "That worked really well, once we'd figured out the kinks."

"Do it on *him*." Peter pointed at Sirius, "It's his turn."

"Don't whinge, Pete," Sirius groaned. He flopped down on his bed. "Do it on me, Moony, I'm not a *coward*."

"Ok, fine," Remus withdrew his wand. Sirius leapt up,

"Wait, you want to do it *now*?!"

"Well, the sooner the better..."

"What about the counter-jinx?!"

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure I've got that sorted," Remus let a smile creep onto his face. He knew for certain that the counter-jinx worked, but it was too much fun to watch Sirius squirm.

"Oh for goodness' sake." James sighed, getting out of his quidditch gear, "Do it to me, Lupin, I don't mind. Only I don't want to say any of the words on that awful list of yours. Can you do it for something else?"

"If you like," Remus replied.

"Yeah, about this list, Moony..." Sirius said, picking it up off the bedside table,

"What?"

"Well... it's *really* long."

“Yeah,” Remus raised an eyebrow, “What’s your point? They’re all insults for non-purebloods, aren’t they?”

“Yeah,” Sirius said, scratching his chin, “Yeah, they are, but, um... well I just didn’t think there were so many. Never seen them all written out like that. And anyway, where did you hear all of these?!”

“Where’d you think?” Remus met Sirius’s eyes, deliberately. He’d been waiting for something like this. “Don’t be a girl about it, Black, it doesn’t bother me. Right, James, what word do you want to swap?”

“Evans.” Sirius said, suddenly, “Sick of hearing that come out of his mouth.”

“Ok,” Remus smiled, “Then change it to what?”

“Don’t tell me!” James said, “We’ll do a blind test so we know it definitely works. Pick something Black hasn’t come up with yet.”

Remus nodded, scribbled something onto a piece of parchment, then raised his wand, concentrating. He flicked his wand sharply at James and uttered the incantation.

All four of them stood by, silently, watching.

“Er...” Remus said, “Did you feel anything?”

“Nope.” James looked down at himself, as if he expected to see something different.

“Well, say it, then!” Sirius urged.

“Her full name,” Remus added.

James cleared his throat theatrically, squaring his shoulders. He outstretched one arm and placed a hand on his chest as though he were about to make some grand announcement,

“LUMPY ELEPHANT DUNG.” He proclaimed.

Peter burst into a fit of giggles so strong he almost fell off the bed. Sirius whooped with laughter, and James turned bright red,

“I didn’t know you were going to pick something like that!” He said, “That’s my future wife!”

“Who’s your future wife?” Sirius asked, quickly,

“Elephant dung.” James replied, then clapped his hands to his mouth. “Lupin!”

“You said you didn’t mind,” Remus replied, business-like, “Now, try saying ‘Evans’ again, but really *really* try to break my spell, ok?”

“Elephant dung.” James said, promptly. Then with more force, “*Elephant* dung.” He screwed up his eyes, “Ele-phan-t... d...dung. Lumpy elephant dung.” He hung his head, sadly.

Peter could hardly breathe for laughing now, and Sirius had to lean on the bedpost for support.

“Excellent.” Remus smiled. He put down his list. “Hey, it’s six o’clock. Shall we go for dinner?”

“Yeah, just do the counter-jinx first.” James said.

“Oh no,” Remus shook his head solemnly, “Sorry Potter, but I want to test the spell thoroughly – we need to be sure it won’t wear off too quickly. I’ll un-jinx you tomorrow morning.”

“What?!” James roared,

“Oh yes!” Sirius gasped, wiping tears from his eyes.

“Sorry,” Remus said again, not sorry at all, “Just be glad we didn’t pick a common word, I s’pose.”

“B-but, what if I run into elephant dung?”

“Oh I don’t think you will,” Remus gave a small smile, “Hardly any elephants in Scotland.”

James grimaced,

“You know what I mean! Lumpy! Lumpy elephant dung?!”

Remus shrugged,

“Don’t yell her name? Come on, I’m starving!”

* * *

“James! Look who it is!”

“Shut. Up.” James gritted his teeth and looked stonily at his dinner plate. Sirius shook his head disapprovingly, the picture of piety.

“That’s no way to greet... what’s her name?”

“I’m not rising to it, you know. I’m stronger than that.” James said, viciously cutting into his steak and kidney pie.

“She’s right there, mate,” Sirius said, trying to control his smirk, “How will she ever notice you if you don’t call her?”

“Oi, Evans,” Remus said, suddenly, waving at the redhead, “Want to sit with us?”

She stopped and looked at them, warily,

“Why?”

“You’re a Gryffindor, we’re Gryffindors...” Sirius said, getting up to give her his seat next to James, “We’re supposed to sit together. Plus, it’ll really bother Potter.”

“Well in that case.” Lily sat down. Sirius pushed Remus up to make room beside him. Lily looked at James curiously, who had turned beetroot red. “Why do I bother you, Potter?”

“You don’t!” He said, quickly, “They’re just being prats.”

“Language, Potter!” Sirius said, severely, pouring gravy over his mashed potato and peas. “That’s no way to speak in front of a lady.”

“What’s going on?” Lily eyed Remus suspiciously, “Are you all making fun of me?”

“We’re making fun of James.” Peter squeaked, sounding as though he was having a hard time containing his excitement. For once, he was not the butt of the joke, and it was clearly a dizzying

notion.

"I'm testing a spell on him." Remus said, simply. Lily's eyes flashed as she analysed the situation.

"And what was the spell?"

"Mutatio Verbi."

Her eyebrows shot up,

"Is that... oh my god, Remus, which word?!"

"Um..."

"Lumpy elephant dung." James said, glumly. Peter spat out his pumpkin juice and knocked his fork flying. Lily giggled, nervously,

"What did you say, Potter?"

"Lll...Lumpy." James strained to fight the spell, "Lumpy elephant dung... lumpy."

"Lumpy...?! Oh, for pity's sake!" Lily glared at Sirius, "It's my name, isn't it?"

"Don't look at me!" Sirius grinned, holding his hands up, "It was Moony's idea!"

Lily turned to Remus, her frown disappearing,

"Really, Remus?"

"Err... yeah, but it wasn't meant to be offensive or anyth-"

"That's amazing!" She said, "Really clever magic!"

"Wait until tomorrow!" Peter said, recovering from his hysterics. Sirius kicked him under the table.

"I'm so sorry, elephant dung." James said, looking genuinely forlorn. This time, even Lily laughed.

* * *

Wednesday 31st October 1973

"Nothing's happening."

"Well they're not going to start insulting each other, are they?"

"We have to push them into it. Pete, go and—"

"Oi, I'm pureblood!"

"Oh yeah, fair play. Um... Moony, go and trip one of them or something. Do it to Snivellus. Or my cousin, yeah, get Cissy!"

"No." Remus said, quietly. Ignoring the fact that he actually had no problem with Narcissa, he didn't want to be so obvious. "We'll just wait. Patience, Black, patience."

"But it might take days."

“It won’t.” Mary said, stonily. “You three must be blind if you haven’t seen what’s going on around here.” That shut them up.

Mary was sitting beside Sirius for the second time that week. Remus didn’t mind – he liked Mary, she was funny and brusque and bolshie, but unfailingly kind and full of compassion. She was his *friend*. But. Well, she wasn’t a marauder, was she?! Her presence felt intrusive, somehow; didn’t quite mesh with their usual back-and-forth. And she *always* sat next to Sirius, which meant no one could talk to him without her listening in and batting her eyes. Of course, Remus knew that she fancied him and everything, but he wasn’t sure that Sirius knew that yet – or perhaps that was how you were supposed to act when someone fancied you.

“What’s been going on, then?” James asked, very seriously. “Do you get called stuff, MacDonald?”

She shrugged, sipping her pumpkin juice.

“It’s been worse this year. You must know, Remus?”

Remus nodded, vaguely, looking away, as if he was more interested in watching the Slytherins. It was the Halloween feast, and everyone was in high spirits. Professor Flitwick had enchanted glittering black bats to swoop over their heads, fine silvery cobwebs glistened from the rafters, and the Great Hall was filled with the autumnal smells of roast pumpkin, wood smoke and baked apples.

“So...” James continued, slowly, “Have all the muggleborns been getting it, then? Even... even elephant dung – oh for fuck’s sake, Remus! Please fix me!”

“If you’ll do my Potions homework.” Remus replied, quick as a dart.

“Fine! Anything! I’ll give you my bloody broomstick if you’ll just—”

“*Finite*.” Remus pointed his wand at James. James stared at him, looking stunned. He cleared his throat,

“Lily Evans.” He said, very clearly, then grinned,

“What now, Potter?!” Lily turned around, her conversation with Marlene interrupted.

“Will you go out with me?”

“No.” She turned away again.

“Cheers Moony.”

“Any time.”

“Wait.” Sirius said, “Wait just a minute. The counter-jinx was *Finite Incantatum*?!”

“Yep.”

“But that’s just the standard counter spell!”

Remus shrugged,

“I never said it was anything difficult. You pure bloods don’t have an ounce of common sense between you.”

Mary squawked with laughter, James choked on his roast potato and Sirius slapped Remus on the back.

“I swear, Moony. When it comes to evil schemes, none of us have got anything on you.”

Remus flushed with pride and shook him off, returning to his dinner.

“Look!” Peter cried, suddenly, pointing a chubby finger in the direction of the Slytherin table. A Hufflepuff second year had wandered too close to Mulciber, who stood up and was looming over them.

“Yes,” Sirius whispered, “Go on, you big troll...”

The Hufflepuff was trembling so much that they sloshed their drink, spilling most of it down their own robes, but also lightly sprinkling the toes of Mulciber’s huge black shoes. The snub nosed Slytherin grabbed the Hufflepuff by the tie – the rest of the Slytherins turned to watch, eagerly.

“Clean that up, you angelic sweetie-pops.”

Dead silence. The Hufflepuff looked confused, and let out a nervous laugh. Mulciber looked stupider than usual.

“What did you say, Mulciber?” Snape asked, staring at him.

“*Angelic sweetie-pops!*” Mulciber roared, red-faced. “No! I meant – *darling sugar plum!* No! *Goody-gumdrops!*”

The entire hall erupted in laughter.

“Bloody hell,” Sirius said, under his breath, “Mulciber’s really got a mouth on him, eh? I didn’t think they’d use half of those.”

“Sit down, you idiot.” Snape chastised the bully, who had let go of the Hufflepuff’s tie, and was helplessly spouting cutesy nonsense.

“That was brilliant, Sirius!” Mary hugged him. Remus suddenly lost his appetite. Sirius just tossed his hair gallantly,

“Just wait,” he said, “That was just the beginning.”

Third Year: Sirius Turns Fourteen

Friday 2nd November 1973

Remus peered around the dorm room door quietly, and – finding the coast clear – crept inside. He carefully opened his trunk and shoved the package inside, covering it up with an old pair of jeans.

“Hiya, Moony,” a voice behind him gave Remus such a fright that he dropped the trunk lid with a heavy *THUNK* and spun around. James was emerging from the bathroom, his dark hair wet and his glasses steamed up.

“Hi.” He said, hoping he didn’t look like he was up to anything.

“Are you up to something?” James squinted at him.

“No.”

“What are you doing?”

“Nothing!”

“Is it Sirius’s birthday present?”

Remus’s shoulders sagged, he sighed.

“Yes.”

“You don’t have to hide it from *me*, Moony,” James laughed, easily, throwing his towel onto his bed and beginning to get dressed. “I won’t tell him.”

Remus just shrugged awkwardly. He’d really only wanted to hide the fact that he had spent the past two hours in the fourth-floor girl’s loos trying to wrap the stupid thing, with Moaning Myrtle cackling overhead, giving no useful advice at all.

He was also trying to avoid any awkward questions about where he’d got the money. His stash of stolen cigarettes was now almost entirely depleted, and he had just about enough money left over to buy Christmas gifts for his friends and – if he was prudent – something for himself. He didn’t have his heart set on anything, but Remus rather liked the idea that he could just go ahead and buy something if it caught his fancy.

“Lucky it’s a Saturday this year,” he said to James, relaxing a bit, “D’you know what we’re going to do?”

“Well obviously, we’ll have to sing ‘happy birthday’ at breakfast,” James said, very seriously.

“Obviously.” Remus agreed.

“And lunch, and dinner. I’ve got quidditch practice in the morning, but I got Hooch to let me have an extra half an hour on the pitch before the Ravensclaws go on, so we can do a bit of flying.”

“Oh, good,” Remus said, with a little less enthusiasm. It wasn’t his idea of a good time to sit in the quidditch stands alone on a cold November morning – but it was Sirius’s birthday, after all. Maybe he could bring a book.

“Then I suppose he’ll have to do that afternoon tea thing with Regulus and Narcissa. So, we’ll have to find out when that ends before we can sort out a proper party. D’you think the others ‘ll mind if we use the common room?”

“Nah,” Remus shook his head, with confidence. No one could deny James and Sirius anything – especially a very noisy birthday party. This was true at any given time during the year, but especially this week, when the marauder’s popularity appeared to be at its peak.

Remus had hardly been able to walk down a corridor since Wednesday without hearing a cheer, or getting a pat on the back from fellow Gryffindors, Ravenclaws or Hufflepuffs. The Slytherins still scowled, still glared daggers if he passed them – but they couldn’t *say* anything. A few tried, of course. For the first two days after Halloween, the occasional ‘*angelic sweetie pops*’ or ‘*honey fluffkins*’ could be heard – and met with raucous laughter. Snape had even lost his temper completely during their Friday Charms lesson and called James a ‘*lovely little poppet*’, which nearly killed Sirius with laughter, and mortified Lily.

The best part of this prank, which Remus hadn’t even considered when he’d planned it, was that none of the Slytherins could complain to the staff about the spell – because that would mean explaining which words had been replaced. So, it was a slow and immensely enjoyable process to watch as the Slytherin students tried to figure out the counter curse by themselves.

“Serves them right,” Marlene giggled, early that morning, “If they were Hufflepuffs they’d all have lifted the spell by now.”

Overnight, the marauders had gone from being class clowns – well-liked and cheerfully tolerated – to heroes of the house war that had been brewing all year. Remus tried not to think about the long-term effects this might have, and focussed instead on Sirius’s upcoming fourteenth birthday. Somehow, fourteen sounded even more mature than thirteen – you were definitely *definitely* a teenager at fourteen.

Mary sat with them at dinner that evening, yet again. Once or twice, Remus had thought about asking James how he felt about this new arrangement, but stopped himself. After all, James seemed not to care at all, and carried on as usual. And Mary wasn’t doing anything wrong by sitting on her own house table.

Truthfully, Remus had not yet been able to put his finger on why her presence bothered him so much, except that she always sat next to Sirius, which he thought was a bit of an obvious display. Sirius’s continued coyness about the whole subject was just as infuriating. Remus didn’t like other people keeping secrets.

“What time will you be free tomorrow, Black?” James asked, as they tucked into crispy golden battered cod and thick cut chips.

“What d’you mean?” Sirius asked, liberally splashing vinegar over his, before passing the bottle to Remus. Mary, who had been reaching for the vinegar, shot Remus a funny look.

“You know, what time do you think your Black family tea will be finished? For your birthday?”

“Oooh, is it your birthday, Sirius?” Mary smiled, “You never said! I would have got you something!”

“Would you?” Sirius looked at her, mildly puzzled. He turned back to James, “I don’t think the tea is happening this year. Haven’t had a note.”

“Oh, really?” James raised his eyebrows, which always gave him a bit of an owlish expression, “Are you... I mean, is that ok?”

Sirius snorted, looking at his food,

“Why wouldn’t it be? Like I give a toss.”

“Well... great, then.” James grinned, shooting a look at Peter and Remus that only they would understand, “We can crack on with planning you the messiest party Gryffindor tower has ever seen.”

“Yeah!” Peter added, for good measure.

“Am I invited?” Mary asked, sitting up straighter.

“Obviously.” Remus said, his voice more sarcastic than he meant it to be, “*Everyone’s* invited.”

“Look, maybe don’t make a big fuss.” Sirius said, playing with his peas, “I don’t feel like it much.”

“Oh, why not?” Mary cooed, “It’ll be fun! We’ll make it as good as Remus’s birthday last year – even better!”

Sirius said nothing, and James threw another look at Peter and Remus. They ate the rest of their meal in almost total silence.

* * *

Saturday 3rd November 1973

Remus woke up alone on the morning of Sirius’s birthday, finding a note pinned to the bathroom door, written in beautiful cursive.

Gone for quidditch practice – knew you wouldn’t want to come so let you lie in. See you later. S.

Remus showered and then decided he may as well go to the library. He had finished his essay on class XXX magical creatures, and wanted to get a head start on class XXXX creatures. (He had recently learnt that he, skinny, thirteen-year-old Remus Lupin, was classified XXXXX, alongside manticores and dragons.)

They were going ahead with the party with or without Sirius’s consent – a decision made by James and backed up by Remus. Even when he had a case of the blues, Sirius could not resist being the centre of attention and making as much noise as possible. Peter had been put in charge of decorations and – with some help from Mary and Marlene – had come up trumps, hiding a trunkful of streamers and balloons in the third year girl’s dormitory. James handled the invitations – which as far as Remus had seen involved shouting at various students telling them they’d better be there or else. Remus was responsible for food – something which was simple enough when you had access to the map and invisibility cloak.

He ate a quiet breakfast by himself with his book. Mealtimes were a much more peaceful affair since the Slytherins had been temporarily muzzled. Even those that had managed to break the spell were keeping their mouths shut, at least for a while.

The book Remus was reading was so interesting that he couldn’t put it down, and instead continued to read as he meandered his way slowly towards the library, occasionally sticking his hand out to avoid crashing into any pillars or doorways. So, it was completely his own fault when he bumped

headlong into Regulus Black, knocking the younger boy to the floor.

“Oh, sorry!” Remus said, dropping his book and automatically offering a hand to help him up. Regulus glared at him, and narrowed his eyes at the scars criss-crossing Remus’s wrists. He climbed to his feet unassisted, brushing himself off, sniffing at Remus with his inherited Black dignity.

“Watch where you’re going.” He said, icily.

“I said sorry.” Remus replied, a bit annoyed. He didn’t want to start anything, he just wanted to get to the library without any trouble.

“What are you doing wandering about alone, anyway,” Regulus asked, suspiciously, “Planning some other hilarious assault on our freedom of speech?”

Remus scoffed,

“I could ask you the same thing. Where’s that creepy little Crouch kid? Anyway, you can’t prove we did anything.”

“No,” Regulus’s lips curled, “But I know my brother was involved.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yes. I didn’t get the same words as everyone else.”

“Hmm?” Remus tried to look unconcerned by this – but he’d had no idea that Sirius had cursed his brother differently.

“Every time I try to say my house’s name, it comes out...” Regulus glanced furtively about himself, as if afraid he might be overheard, “*Go Gryffindor Go!*”

Remus burst out laughing, under Regulus’s imperious glare.

“Sorry,” Remus said, for the third time, “It’s... well it is quite funny.”

“Of course *you* think it’s funny.” The younger boy sniffed. He was shorter than Remus, but somehow still managed to look down his nose at him, “You... your *kind* can’t possibly understand what my brother is putting a stake. I’ve done my best to hide the worst of it from our parents, but he has to keep pushing it...”

“So is that why he’s not invited to your stupid Nancy tea party?” Remus asked, angry on his friend’s behalf.

“Narcissa didn’t think it was worth it, this year,” Regulus’s cold stare faltered, and he looked away. Remus had the impression that Regulus would have quite liked a chance to see his brother. “And this latest joke of his has just proved it. He’s never going to... to come back.”

Regulus shook himself and turned in the direction of the dungeons. Remus felt a surge of sympathy, and against his better judgement called him back,

“Reg, wait!”

Regulus turned, looking horrified by Remus’s overfamiliarity. But *Regulus* was such an ugly mouthful of a name. Worse than Remus by a mile. “Look,” he hurried, “We’re having a party for Sirius in the common room tonight, you can come if you—”

“Don’t.” Regulus said, sharply, looking anxious, “Don’t invite me, ok? Just... leave it. Tell him happy birthday for me.” He hurried away.

* * *

With or without Regulus, the party was a roaring success. Quite literally; every lion motif in the common room (and there were quite a few) had been enchanted to roar every time anyone said the words ‘birthday’ or ‘Sirius’.

The whole of Gryffindor house got involved, and Remus was pretty sure that some of the older students were passing around flasks of something a bit stronger than the butterbeer everyone else was drinking. Sirius’s record player was spinning wildly at double time, and lots of the girls had got up to dance. Mary tried to haul Sirius up for *John, I’m Only Dancing*, but he shook his head fervently and stayed on the couch with Remus and Peter.

“I only know the waltz,” he confided to them in a whisper, “And I’ll be fucked if I ever do that again.”

James did get up and tried to shake his hips as close to Lily as possible, but quickly tripped over a ruck in the rug and nearly went headlong into the fireplace. Sirius laughed heartily at this, and Remus was pleased to see that at least he wasn’t letting his family get to him today. He decided not to tell Sirius about his encounter with Regulus just yet – it wouldn’t make him any happier, so what was the point?

“You’re Lupin, aren’t you?” A girl leaned over the back of the sofa, her long black hair brushing Remus’s shoulder. He’d seen her before; she was a sixth year.

“Um, yeah,” he nodded, jumping up.

“My friend, Fariahah, says you’re selling—”

“Err, come over here!” He jumped in jerking his head wildly. He’d so far managed to conduct his business privately and without the other marauders knowing. “What’d you want?” He asked, once they were in the furthest corner away from Sirius and Peter.

“Two packs of whatever you’ve got.” She said.

“A galleon.”

“What?!” She exclaimed, “But Fariahah said it was five sickles a pack!”

“I’m running low on stock,” Remus said, disinterested, “supply and demand.”

“Ugh, fine.” She folded her arms and tossed her head, “A galleon.”

“Can’t get them now. Meet me here at seven tomorrow. AM.”

“On a Sunday?!”

“I have plenty of customers, y’know.”

“All right, all right...”

“What’s going on there, Moony?” Sirius eyed him as Remus returned to the couch. His suspicious look was identical to his brother’s. “Not *another* girlfriend?”

“Shuddup,” Remus kicked him.

“Who’s your girlfriend, Remus?” Mary sat up, looking interested. *God*, Remus thought, *where did she come from?!*

“I don’t have a girlfriend, Black’s just being a dick.”

“Good,” Mary settled down, smiling smugly, “Because if you did,” She twirled her corkscrew hair around one finger, “I know someone who’d be really disappointed...”

“Oh. Ok.” He replied, trying not to show her how annoyed he was.

“Who fancies Moony?” Sirius asked, nudging Mary.

“I couldn’t possibly tell you.” Mary replied, mimicking buttoning her lips. Remus wished she’d do that for real, for good.

“Girls.” Sirius said, with exasperation, “Nightmares, the bloody lot of you.”

Mary mock-pouted, but said nothing more. Sirius shook his head at her, but he was smiling. Finally, he returned to Remus, “So what are you selling? That girl said you were selling something.”

“Nope.” Remus said, innocently. “She had the wrong person.”

“I’ll work it out, you know.” Sirius said, a look of glee in his deep blue eyes. “Not that I’m not grateful for the truly excellent birthday present,” he nodded at the floor where his recently unwrapped *Zonko’s Deluxe practical joke kit* lay, proudly proclaiming; ‘*Sure to complete the collection of any master prankster*’. “But I’m going to figure out how you paid for it, eventually. I don’t believe this stuff about a dead aunt leaving you money.”

“Your dead uncle left you money,” Remus countered.

“Can’t touch it ‘til I’m of age though, can I?” Sirius said, shrewdly, “Nope, you’re up to something, Lupin, I know you – you’re not Moony if you don’t have a secret.”

“So let me have my secret then,” Remus turned his head, mysteriously.

Third Year: Know Thyself

Sunday 11th November 1973

Remus fell awake, spluttering and shivering. The room was gloomy, and his breath blew out in white plumes above his head. Everything hurt. He raised his hands in front of his face and found his fingertips blue and bloody. There were splinters under his nails, and more blood somewhere else – he could smell it, but he couldn't see very well in the dark and he didn't have the energy to lift his head. His bones felt like they were made of chalk. He was so, so tired.

Still, if there was as much blood as he thought, it probably wasn't a good idea to sleep. He ought to stay awake at least until Madam Pomfrey could arrive – which shouldn't be long. Remus lay still and focussed on his breathing. There was a Gryffindor game on today as well, another thing he'd be missing. Not only that, but his friends would be too busy to visit.

He turned his head and heaved. He hoped he wouldn't be sick, it was so embarrassing being sick. He didn't have his wand with him, so he couldn't clean it up.

"Good morning, Remus," Madam Pomfrey finally entered the room. "Oh dear, bit of a mess, eh?"

He raised his head, and promptly threw up.

* * *

"I'm not sure I like all this reading you do," Madam Pomfrey tutted as she brought him a healing draught. "I know your studies are important to you, but you need rest."

"I slept all morning," He replied, "And I get so bored, otherwise. Do you know how the quidditch match went?"

"I'm afraid I don't," the medi-witch smiled. "I'm sure Mr Potter will be up here to tell you as soon as he can, though."

That wasn't very likely, if they'd won – there would be a victory party, and Remus had made James promise not to miss it on his account. He accepted the potion he was given, and swallowed it all without complaint. It was bitter, but he'd grown used to it now.

He had to read, because if he didn't, he would have nothing to do at all, except think about his fresh scars. This month the wolf had torn at his torso, which was better than his arms or face – at least he could hide the marks easier.

Remus rarely undressed in front of anyone; even once the marauders had found out about his furry little problem. No one but Madam Pomfrey had seen the true extent of the damage (well, Sirius had, once, early in second year, but neither of them had since acknowledged that strange encounter). Still, Remus wasn't naïve, and he knew that one day, however far away it might be, *someone* would expect him to take his top off – at the very least. It didn't bear thinking about. Perhaps he'd just have to avoid girls forever.

"Mr Lupin!" A cheerful voice boomed across the hospital floor, making Remus jump. It was Professor Ferox, holding two large jars of clear liquid in his arms.

"Oh, hello," Remus gave a small wave.

“Murtlap essence, as promised, Poppy,” the professor set down the jars. *Don’t come over, don’t come over*, Remus thought frantically as Professor Ferox strode across the room towards his bed. “Been in the wars, our kid?” He asked, kindly.

“Um...” Remus wanted to shrink and hide under the bedsheets. He hated the thought of strong, energetic Ferox seeing him in his weakened state. “I’m ok.”

Ferox sat down beside Remus’s bed. Remus resigned himself to his fate.

“Second time in here this year, eh?” The professor said, looking concerned. Remus nodded, even though it was his third moon this term. If Ferox hadn’t noticed one absence, then perhaps he wouldn’t connect the dots. “You know, if you need some more time for your homework, you only need to ask.”

“I’ve never handed anything in late!” Remus protested.

“No,” Ferox’s eyes twinkled, “You certainly haven’t.” His eyes moved to the bandages poking out of Remus’s pyjama vest, covering a new cut that snaked up his collar bone. Something registered in the older man’s eyes, and Remus knew almost instinctively that Ferox *knew*.

“I can do anything anyone else can.” Remus said, looking his teacher in the eye.

“I can see that.” Ferox now eyed the pile of books on the bedside table. “Are these all for school?”

“Some of them.” Remus replied, “Some are for fun. I like finding out new stuff. I like knowing stuff.”

“Yes, I can tell that from your essays,” Ferox was smiling again, which made Remus relax a bit.

“Do you fancy a career caring for magical creatures? Or maybe something more like your father?”

“Er... I hadn’t thought about it.” Remus lied.

Ferox laughed. He tapped the book at the top of the pile. It was borrowed from Sirius – a muggle philosophy book.

“*Know thyself*, Remus.” Ferox said.

“Plato.” Remus said quickly.

Ferox laughed again, standing up.

“Exactly.” He ruffled Remus’s hair before turning to leave, “I hope you feel better soon, Lupin. See you on Wednesday.”

It was all very cryptic, Remus thought, realising he’d been holding his breath for almost a minute as Ferox left the room. He hadn’t started the Plato yet, only skimmed it – it wasn’t the sort of thing he was usually interested in, but he’d committed to try a bit of everything.

Secretly, he wanted to be able to show off to Sirius that he had read more books. Sirius hardly spent any time reading any more – his single-minded mission to fulfil his role as the Black family black sheep meant that he had little time for anything other than causing trouble. He’d regret that, one day, in Remus’s opinion. Remus had seen plenty of boys at St Edmund’s trying to push their limits like that – the problem was, some limits weren’t fences. Sometimes they were edges; with nothing on the other side.

He healed pretty well, despite the brutal scarring, and Madam Pomfrey sent him back to Gryffindor tower that evening, with the understanding that he did nothing but rest. He walked slowly, as promised. When he finally reached the common room, he did not find the victory party he had expected, but a rather subdued atmosphere, and the marauders were nowhere to be seen.

Remus furrowed his brow, and headed up the stairs to find the bedroom also empty. Puzzled, he went back downstairs. Marlene and Mary were playing snap by the fireplace.

“Hiya,” he went over.

“All right, Remus? Where’ve you been?” Mary asked, not looking up from her cards.

“Been sick. Stomach bug. How was the game?”

“We lost,” Marlene sighed, “James was bloody brilliant as usual, and I must have blocked at least twenty bludgers, but Ramsay caught the snitch right at the wrong time.”

“Ah, sorry McKinnon.” Remus rubbed the back of his head. That was odd – if they’d lost, and there had been no party, then why hadn’t the others come to see him? He tried to ignore the stabbing feeling in his stomach. “You seen James since? Or Sirius or anyone?”

“Nope.” The girls said in unison. Marlene slammed down a card, then winced as it blew up. She looked up,

“Want to play?”

“Er... nah. I still feel a bit funny. Going to lie down. Thanks, though.”

He trudged back up the stairs, feeling an uncomfortable mix of anxiety and anger. He’d said they shouldn’t put off celebrating just for him, but that didn’t mean he didn’t want to see them *at all*. They didn’t have to leave him on his own like that, without so much as checking to see if he was ok. For all they knew, he could be in the infirmary still, at death’s door and with no one but Madam Pomfrey for company. Were they bored of the whole thing? Was it less exciting now? Was *he* less exciting?

Remus lay on his bed on top of the covers. He felt like he’d only been out of pyjamas for an hour, he didn’t want to get back into them, no matter how tired he was. He considered reading, but he didn’t have the energy. He could listen to a record, but that would mean getting up. In the end, he stayed put, lying in the dark with the curtains drawn.

At St Edmund’s, before he could read, before he had magic, or friends, Remus had grown used to boredom. He would make up stories in his head, run through song lyrics he had memorised, or try to come up with the longest words he’d ever heard. Now, as he waited for sleep to come, Remus pondered on what Ferox had said to him earlier.

Know thyself. He couldn’t remember the context for Plato having said that – it had to mean ‘know who you are’.

Remus knew all about his friends. He knew that James was a natural leader, a quidditch god who would do anything for anyone. Remus knew that even though they all teased James for being infatuated with Lily, James had a clearer understanding of love than anyone, and if he said he was going to marry her one day then he probably would. Remus knew that Peter was ashamed of his family, especially his older sister who he’d once looked up too, and that fitting in meant more to

him than anything else in the world. Remus knew that Mary's parents were born in Jamaica, and that she was the only witch in a family of seven, and that she never, ever cried, even when she was furious. He knew that *Lily* cried every time she got a letter from home, and that she wrote to her sister every week and hadn't once received a response. He knew that Marlene didn't get on very well with her dad, who was a muggle, and who drank too much sometimes.

Then there was Sirius – but it took nothing special to know Sirius. He *thought* he was aloof and mysterious, but the truth was that Black wore his heart on his sleeve, and kept nothing back. He felt everything so strongly, and his happiness was as chaotic as his misery. Sometimes you had to take a step back, in case you got dragged under his wheels.

Who was Remus, then? An orphan – but not quite. A wizard, but only half-blood. A monster, but not every day. What else was there? No need to flesh out supporting characters too much.

CREAK

“Moony?” The whisper filled the room as loud as a klaxon. Remus did not reply. He was too grumpy.

The door opened, and three sets of footsteps entered. Even with the bedcurtains drawn, Remus knew it was James who approached first. “Psst, Moony? You sleeping, mate?”

He sighed, rolling over.

“No.”

The curtains were pulled aside. Remus sat up to make room as James, then Sirius, then Peter crawled inside to sit with him.

“We went to the hospital wing, but she said you'd gone already.” James explained.

“Came up after dinner. Where were you?”

“Library.”

“How was it?” Sirius asked, “The full moon and everything?”

“Ok.” He gave the same answer every month.

“It wasn't... I mean, you weren't cut up, too much?” Peter asked, wringing his hands.

“A bit.” Remus nodded, “Not too bad. What were you doing in the library?”

“That's what we wanted to talk to you about!” Sirius burst out. Obviously he was dying to say something, and Remus felt the last of his irritation melt away as his curiosity peaked.

“Sirius.” James said, in the voice he used to temper his friends. He looked at Remus, “We were doing some research, and it's sort of about you.”

“Sort of!” Sirius scoffed, “It's *all* about you, Moony, I've wanted to tell you since last term, but James wouldn't—”

“I just wanted to make sure we could do it.” James elbowed Sirius, “Stop interrupting me, bloody hell. Remus. The thing is, ever since we found out about ...um... your furry little problem, we've wanted to do something to help.”

“There’s no cure.” Remus replied, quickly. He didn’t like the sound of this. He felt horribly self-conscious as they all stared at him with the same mad look in their eyes.

“No no, we know that,” James waved a hand, “But we thought there must be *something* we could do – to make you stop hurting yourself, you know.”

“We found out that normal werewolves don’t do that,” Peter said, eager to have his own say, “So w--”

“Normal?!” Remus said, alarmed.

“Not *normal*,” Sirius kicked Peter, “*Others*. Others like you. Who don’t get locked up during the moon.”

“Right...”

“So you’re probably doing it to yourself because you’re trapped, and frustrated.”

“Well... yeah, I knew that.” Remus drew his knees up to his chest and inched back a bit. He wished they weren’t on his bed, they were all much too close. He could smell their blood; he could hear it rushing in their veins.

“But we thought if you had company--”

“Obviously not human company,” James explained, hurriedly, “Everything we’ve read says that if you even get *near* a human then they’re a goner,”

“But animals!” Sirius exploded, “Other animals would probably be fine!” His eyes shone with excitement, and Remus wished he could return it, but he was too distracted to be able to follow what they were saying.

“So what? I need a pet?”

James laughed,

“Sort of. But we thought... *we* could be the animals.”

Remus stared at him. He looked at each of his friends in turn. They were all barking mad.

“You’re going to be animals.” He said, flatly.

“Like McGonagall!” Peter squeaked.

“Like... but she’s an animagus! You have to study, and train, and get registered, and you can’t even *start* until you’re seventeen—”

“Moony, Moony, Moony,” Sirius shook his head, infuriatingly, “We’re *marauders*. We don’t need to bother with all of that.”

“Even if you wanted to break the law,” Remus caught James’s eye on that point, to confirm that this was definitely what they were talking about, “This isn’t some school prank. It’s serious magic – one of the hardest things to do!”

“That’s why we’re telling you about it,” Sirius said, “I wanted it all to be a surprise, but James reminded us that... well, it is really bloody hard, so the more help we get the better.”

“You really think you can do it, don’t you?” Remus frowned.

“If you help us.” James nodded, “We’re the best students in the year, except for Evans. Don’t see why we shouldn’t try.”

“What if it goes wrong?!” Remus chewed his lip, “What if I still... after I transform, what if I can tell you’re not really animals? What if I go for you anyway?”

“We’ll test it. We’ll test it over and over until we know it’s safe.” Sirius said.

“It’s so risky...”

“I know!” Black’s eyes were practically blazing in his head now, and Remus knew there was no point trying to be reasonable. He took a deep breath.

“Let me think about it, please?” He appealed to James. “Don’t do anything yet. Just... give me a few days.”

“Ok.” James nodded, “That’s fair.”

“Just think, Moony!” Sirius grinned, as if he hadn’t heard them, “Once we’ve done this, there’s nothing we can’t do. We’ll be unstoppable!”

Third Year: Philomena Pettigrew

Friday 21st December 1973

Once he was finally given the space to think about it, Remus wondered why he'd even asked for more time. Of *course* he would say yes. He didn't think he'd ever say no to his friends, even if it made him nervous. And it did make him nervous.

Perhaps it was their excitement that worried him – or their over-confidence. He knew that part of their eagerness had to do with the plan being incredibly illegal, dangerous and reckless. But they were also doing it for *him*. He wasn't sure how to feel about that yet. Better not to think about it.

He took James aside one day not long after they'd proposed the idea, and asked for all of the research they had so far. It was promptly presented to him as a huge bundle of parchment; reams and reams of notes and diagrams penned in a familiar neat cursive script. To say that they had been thorough was an understatement. If only Sirius paid that much attention to writing his essays, Remus would never have a hope of beating him to the top of the class.

They had left no stone unturned. They'd charted the full moons for the next decade, at least. They'd practically written an entire history of European lycanthropy, along with feeding habits and migration patterns, pack behaviour, canine communication signals. They had listed every ingredient they would need, its' cost and availability. Every ritual was carefully transcribed, step by step and the incantations spelled out phonetically. There were timelines, suggested locations for certain aspects of the extensive process – everything was painstakingly detailed.

"Christ." Remus said, when he had finished reading it. "You've done all of this..."

"It was mostly Sirius." James grinned, "Actually, basically all of it was Sirius. He did most of it over the summer holidays, while he was bored. A real labour of love."

Remus's stomach flipped. He didn't know what to say – how could he refuse them after all that? Suddenly selling stolen cigarettes to underage wizards seemed very tame indeed.

It was agreed that work would begin in earnest over the Christmas holidays, when they would all be away from Hogwarts. Remus had secured permission from Matron, McGonagall *and* Madam Pomfrey to spend the break with the Potters, and as always, Peter was only up the road. Sirius was in a dark mood as term drew to a close – until he received a very short note during breakfast one morning:

To Master S. O. Black III,

You will not be required at the family home this winter break. Do as you please.

Signed,

Orion Black.

"Yes!" James cheered, almost knocking over his porridge, "Might even get you for the summer, at this rate!"

“What about Regulus?” Remus asked, tentatively, quietly in case Sirius wanted to pretend he hadn’t heard.

“Oh, little Prince Reg is going home for Christmas,” Sirius replied, shoving the note into his pocket. “It’s just me they’ve disinvited. Good. Perfect. Excellent. They don’t care; I don’t care.”

He didn’t properly cheer up until they were packing. Sirius covertly showed Remus the gifts he had bought for Mr and Mrs Potter – a beautiful golden watch chain and a pretty garnet broach.

“D’you think they’re ok?” He asked, nervously, “My family’s shit at doing presents, so I never really know...”

“Black... Sirius, they’re... I mean, they’re perfect. Don’t worry.” Remus felt a sinking feeling as he thought about the slightly shabby box of mid-range biscuits he’d bought for his hosts. It couldn’t be helped now, he had done his best.

Remus was actually looking forward to Christmas this year, for what may have been the very first time. He was still a bit shy about spending time in someone else’s house, but now that he knew how the Potters were, he relaxed into the idea. He had sold the very last of his illicit cigarettes at a premium, and bought presents for everyone he could – even Lily, Mary and Marlene. It was a real pleasure, giving people presents, he realised. Maybe even better than getting them.

In addition, despite some reservations, Remus was excited about beginning the animagus process. It would be some of the most complex magic they had performed yet – he had asked McGonagall about it, as subtly as possible. She had praised him for taking an interest, but said it was well above third year standard, or even seventh year. He relished the thought of proving her wrong.

There was one other thing he was hoping to get out of the break. Something he hadn’t mentioned to the others, because it was private. Last year, at the Potter’s Christmas party, Remus had been accosted by an old man who knew a lot about Lyall Lupin. At the time, Remus had been struck mute by the revelation and shock of it – but now, a year older and feeling quite mature at the grand old age of thirteen, Remus hoped he might learn a bit more.

* * *

Saturday 22nd December 1973

The full moon had fallen earlier in the month this year, so all four of the marauders were able to join their peers aboard the Hogwarts Express on the usual Saturday. In a change from their usual train journey, Marlene and Mary joined the boys in their carriage. Remus suspected that Lily was somewhere on her own with Severus, probably listening to him whinge about how nobody liked him.

“Did you get your essay back off Ferox?” Marlene asked Remus, a deep crease in her brow, “I only barely got an ‘Acceptable’ mark, and mum’s going to go mental if I don’t get better results this year.”

“Yeah, I did ok...” Remus replied, embarrassed by his third ‘Outstanding’ that term.

“We’ll bring back the study club after Christmas, right?” Mary put in, “Lily’s up for it. Don’t worry, Marls, you’ll be fine.”

“Sounds good.” Remus nodded.

“Moony’s joined a club without us!” Sirius wailed, pretending to weep on James’s shoulder.

“He’s a big boy, now,” James patted his friend, solemnly, “They grow up so fast.”

“Piss off.” Remus grinned, “They have slug club for posho’s like you.”

“You can study with us if you want, Sirius,” Mary purred.

Sirius looked alarmed – he used the library exclusively as a resource for jinx and hexes, not for doing anything so mundane as *homework*. Mary didn’t know Sirius. Not really.

When they pulled into King’s Cross, Remus felt a certain thrill when he saw that Mr and Mrs Potter were there to collect all of them. Usually he had to cross the barrier and go looking for Matron in the café or by the newspaper stand. He was in for a shock, however, when he learnt that he was about to apparate for the first time.

“Hold my arm, dear,” Mrs Potter smiled at him kindly, “Close your eyes, it’ll all be over in a moment.”

Remus obeyed, scrunching his eyes shut.

It was *much* worse than floo powder. Worse than flying. He nearly dragged Mrs Potter down with him when they landed, as he lost balance and fell hard on the pavement outside the Potter’s house.

“Whoops-a-daisy!” Mrs Potter laughed kindly, pulling him up again. “You’re all right now.” She brushed his knees and shoulders. “Now, I’ll just pop back for Sirius, Monty will be over with James in two ticks.”

And with a CRACK, she vanished. Remus barely had time to lean on the low front gate and catch his breath before there was another CRACK, and Mr Potter appeared with James, who didn’t look half as bad as Remus felt.

Once they were all there, Mrs Potter ushered them all into the house, sending their trunks flying up the stairs to their respective bedrooms, boiling a kettle and slicing some homemade madeira cake all in what felt like a few seconds. As Remus sat at the Potter’s big wooden kitchen table eating cake and sipping a huge mug of tea, listening to James and Sirius chatter nineteen to the dozen about the term so far, he couldn’t resist sighing contentedly to himself. Two whole weeks of this.

Unfortunately, unlike the previous year, there had been no snow yet this winter, only rain. In fact, as the evening drew on the downpour grew heavier and heavier, until thunder cracked open the sky outside, and hailstones battered the window panes. Rather than go outside, the boys sat in the living room under the Christmas tree playing games and toasting the occasional teacake on the fire. Remus himself settled into a book on human transfiguration, and Mrs Potter reviewed her lists for the coming celebrations.

“We’ve a few more people coming this year,” she explained, as the long thin strips of parchment hovered before her, a royal blue quill working quickly across the surface, ticking off various items. “Some friends from the old days, and some newer acquaintances,” as she said this, she glanced furtively over at Sirius, who wasn’t paying attention, immersed in the game. “Only just have enough room for all of you!” She continued, with a happy smile that was just like her son’s.

Just then, there was a knock at the door. Sirius sat bolt upright, as if he’d been stuck by lightning. He turned to Mrs Potter wide-eyed. It wasn’t his mother, Remus knew this – but he didn’t say so, because how on earth would that sound? *‘Don’t worry, Sirius, I know your mother’s scent.’* Too bloody creepy.

Mrs Potter got up, leaving the lists hovering in mid-air, and went to answer the door. A cold breeze

blew in, and the three boys listened intently. It was a woman, but her voice was higher and younger than that of Walpurga Black. She sounded as though she was crying, and Mrs Potter spoke in soothing tones.

“Boys!” She called from the hallway. They got up and went to meet her. She was standing just inside the kitchen doorway. Behind her, a young woman with long blonde hair sat at the table, her head in her hands.

“What’s up, mum?” James asked, craning his neck.

“It’s getting late – you’d all better go to bed. Philly’s staying the night, and I’m afraid we’ve no room left – Sirius, would you mind sharing with James tonight, dear?”

“We can all share,” James said, generously, “Everyone else is arriving tomorrow anyway, might as well just all bunk up together.”

Mrs Potter nodded, and summoned the house elf.

James’s bedroom was absolutely perfect in every way. Huge and spacious, the walls were plastered with Gryffindor banners and quidditch posters. Every broom he’d ever owned was mounted on the wall, and his shelves were packed with wizard children’s books and old toys that he clearly wasn’t ready to let go of just yet. Chief among these was a little knight figurine, apparently supposed to be Godric Gryffindor himself, marching back and forth along the edge of the bookcase.

The bed was huge, hung with red velvet drapes, the same as their dorm room, and though it was big enough for all three of them, the house elf had whipped up two single beds which lay at the foot of it.

“Who was that?” Remus asked, as they all sat on the big bed together in their pyjamas.

“Philomena,” James said, “Pete’s sister.”

“What’s she doing here?”

“I think she’s been arguing with Pete’s folks – they don’t like her going to muggle university, and,” he lowered his voice, “Dad says she’s got a muggle boyfriend.”

“Really?!” Sirius’s eyes widened in awe. Remus said nothing – he hadn’t known that going out with muggles was particularly taboo.

“Yeah, and you know what mum’s like,” James nudged Sirius, “Loves taking in strays.”

* * *

Christmas Eve, 1973

Philomena was present at breakfast the next morning, and remained for the whole of Christmas. At first, she didn’t say very much, but stared into space, pale faced and red eyed. From what Remus had gathered, going out with a muggle was not only taboo, but an offence worthy of disowning your own child. Apart from the Potters, Remus couldn’t help but think that wizards did not make very good parents, based on his experience.

Peter’s sister was about seven years older than him, and you might not know they were related at all, other than their straw-coloured hair. Where Pete was round and podgy, Philomena was slim

and dainty-featured. She had chocolate brown eyes and a delicate smattering of pale brown freckles over her little nose. Her hair was worn in the same style as many muggle girls Remus had seen; long and poker-straight with a thick parted fringe, like Marianne Faithfull.

James, who knew her best, could not do enough for the pretty visitor. He offered her tea, held out her chair and generally became her willing servant, until even Sirius had had enough of him.

“Bloody hell, Potter, she’s just a *girl*.”

“I’m being nice.” James frowned. “Nothing wrong with being nice to my mate’s sister.”

They hadn’t seen Peter. Once Mrs Pettigrew learnt where her daughter was staying, he had been confined to the house. They were making do by sending owls back and forward, which was probably more fun for James and Sirius than it was for Peter.

“What would Evans say?” Sirius teased James, who turned bright red.

“She’d be glad someone’s taken his mind off her,” Remus suggested from where he was lounging on his camp bed.

“You can talk, Black.” James shoved his friend, “What’s going on between you and Mary?”

“Macdonald?” Sirius asked, innocently, “Dunno what you’re talking about.”

“Oh come *on*,” James groaned, “Tell us! Have you snogged her or what?”

Remus dropped his book. Snogging?! Since when was snogging on the cards?! Sirius gave a coy look.

“No. Kissed her cheek though.”

“Ohhh, how *scandalous*, Black!” James threw a pillow at him. Sirius threw it back and all of a sudden they were wrestling.

Remus usually just rolled his eyes and let them get on with it. But now he used the distraction to gather his thoughts – he felt very childish and silly, not having realised that Sirius liked Mary back. That there was *kissing* involved now, even if it was just a peck on the cheek. Remus wracked his brain, trying to put himself in Sirius’s position. If a girl liked you, you pretty much had to kiss them, wasn’t that the case? Was it awful if a girl didn’t like you? If Sirius now liked Mary, and James liked Lily, ought *he* to pick a girl too? Marlene was ok. A bit shy, like him. Maybe Marlene, then.

The thought kept him up that night, long after James and Sirius had fallen asleep. They both slept in James’s bed – Sirius had simply climbed in on the first night and James hadn’t said a word. Remus kept to himself, on his designated camp bed. He tried to take his mind off it, think about Christmas and stockings and crackers – but it was all in vain. All he could think about was Sirius kissing Mary’s cheek. And where had they done it? When had it happened? What did it feel like?

Eventually, restless and overwrought, he got up to get some water. He padded out of the room, into the bathroom across the hall and ran the tap. He sipped some of the tepid water, and looked at himself in the mirror. In the dim light, he couldn’t see his scars. Would a girl ever like him, if he looked the way he looked? He would never be as good looking as Sirius, or even James, but perhaps he was slightly better than Peter? How on earth could you *know*?!

Suddenly, the lights flashed on, burning his retinas, so that he almost dropped his glass.

“Oh, sorry!” Philomena stood in the doorway in a long peach-coloured nightie. She looked shocked, “What are you doing wandering around in the dark?!”

“Um... I have really good eyesight.” He mumbled, stepping away from the sink. “I couldn’t sleep.”

“Me neither,” she sighed. Once the surprise had left her face, she looked sad again. Remus hoped she wouldn’t cry. He was useless with crying – oh god, if he got a girlfriend would he have to deal with crying?! He had no time to swallow back his panic, before Philomena began talking again, “It’s horrible to be away from family at Christmas, isn’t it?”

“Er... I grew up in a children’s home, actually.”

“Oh really?” She looked interested for a moment, “You’re one of Peter’s little friends, aren’t you? I didn’t know he knew any muggleborns. Kept that quiet from mummy.”

“My dad was a wizard,” Remus said, with some confidence, “But he died.”

“Half-blood.” She murmured. “But even so...” She trailed off, despondently. Remus shifted uncomfortably; his bare feet were beginning to get cold on the bathroom tiles, and he was only wearing his underwear and a vest to sleep in, which was embarrassing enough. She didn’t seem to mind, “You’re lucky,” she said, “Not having to grow up with all of this shit.”

“You mean magic?” Remus frowned. He’d never heard a witch or wizard – pureblood or muggleborn – talk this way.

“Yeah, magic,” she sniffed, “What’s so bloody good about magic, eh? What makes us so special? D’you want to know a secret?”

He didn’t, but thought it better not to say so. She carried on anyway, whispering now, “I wish I was a muggle, sometimes,” she said, a glimmer of madness in her eye, “If I could do it, I’d run away forever and never be found. And I’d have a nice normal job, and a nice normal life, and I’d fall in love with whoever I want.” At this last affirmation, she burst into tears.

“You could do that anyway, if you wanted.” Remus said, quickly, not sure exactly *why* he was saying what he was saying. She looked at him suspiciously,

“What do you mean?”

“Well, what’s stopping you?” He asked. “You’re of age. You can do whatever you feel like. Go and be a waitress, or run away to America and be a film star. Marry Prince Charles if you want to. I mean... you might need to use a bit of magic to get started, but you could give it up. No one says you *have* to do magic.”

She stared at him, and looked him up and down,

“No one’s ever said that to me that before.”

Remus shrugged.

“What’s your name, again?”

“Remus. Remus Lupin.”

“Oh!” She burst out laughing, “You poor thing, that’s almost as bad as Philomena!”

Third Year: The Man Who Cried Wolf

Chapter Summary

The rest of Christmas 1973

WARNING for some pretty gloomy subject matter, including Remus hearing some very unpleasant stuff. Mention of suicide.

Christmas Day, 1973

Remus's odd late night conversation with Philomena had caused him to re-evaluate his anxieties about girlfriends. His ability to comfort her had stirred no particular feelings of chivalry or affection – only a mild sense of relief that he'd got her to stop crying. He definitely had no desire to get that close to any other girl.

He thought about Narcissa for the first time in a while. Remus had secretly thought Narcissa was the most beautiful girl he knew – before she'd dyed her hair anyway. She had a regal sharpness which appealed to him on some base level. But even she was made foolish by love – risking her own life, in fact.

The sight of Philomena sobbing in her nightie only cemented in Remus's mind the revelation that love and relationships were not worth the misery. He had enough pain in his life. Let Sirius and James work it out for themselves, but for the time being, Remus felt very intelligent for having come to this realisation so early in life. He had probably saved himself a lot of needless stress.

Christmas morning was as wonderful as it had been the year before – even Philomena perked up once she saw the gifts under the tree with her name on them. Remus was able to enjoy the immense satisfaction of handing out his own presents, and Sirius and the Potters were all suitably pleased and thanked him profusely. He himself received a chess set from the Potters, which was perhaps the most expensive thing Remus had ever owned – and bought just for him, not second hand. Along with the usual assortment sweets and practical jokes from the marauders, it was a very good haul.

Sirius looked a bit nonplussed at breakfast, as everyone else wolfed down their smoked salmon and scrambled eggs.

"S'up wif yoo?" James asked, mouth full. Sirius shrugged,

"Nothing from Andromeda," he said, quietly, "I didn't think I'd get presents or anything, now she's got the baby, but I thought maybe a card... I sent her one."

James swallowed and patted his friend's shoulder.

"Owl might just be flying late – you know how the post is this time of year."

James had received a brand new broom for Christmas, and as soon as breakfast was finished with, all three boys headed straight outside to test it. Sirius had his own broom with him, and Mr Potter suggested with an arched eyebrow that Remus take James's old one.

"Yeah, have it if you want, Moony!" James nodded enthusiastically, "To keep!"

“Thanks...” Remus took it, unable to say no in front of James’s parents. Goodness knew what he was supposed to do with it over the summer – try explaining that one to Matron.

James and Sirius spent the rest of the morning showing off, and Remus spent it hovering; just skimming the ground with his toes, trying to read his book and look like he was enjoying the broom. He hoped Peter had received his gifts from them, and wasn’t having too bad of a time with his own family.

They were called in by the Potter’s house elf, Gully, who was dressed in a festive tea towel and had a sprig of holly tucked behind one ear. It was almost lunch time, and the house smelled deliciously of roast beef with all the trimmings.

“Upstairs, washed and changed, the lot of you.” Mrs Potter shook her wooden spoon at them, “I’ve had Gully set your things out.”

They washed and dressed quickly, stomachs growling as the wonderful smells from the kitchen wafted up the stairs. Just as they began to make their way down, there was the tell-tale CRACK of apparition outside the front door. Sirius tensed again, and Remus, one step behind him on the staircase, gripped his shoulder in a way that he hoped was comforting.

Sirius turned around and looked Remus in the eye, giving him a gentle smile of appreciation. It was quite un-Sirius-like, but it felt good.

The bell rang and they both turned back to it, James running forward to open the door. A couple stood in the entrance way – a young man and a woman holding a bundle in her arms. He had a mop of fair, curly hair, and was rather stockily built, she was taller and more slender. As they stepped into the light of the hallway, Remus sucked in his breath – she was the spitting image of Sirius’s cousin Bellatrix.

“No!” Sirius gasped, starting forward, a smile bursting on his face.

“Sirius!” The young woman grinned back, and Remus relaxed, seeing that it was not Bellatrix at all. This woman had the same wildly curly hair as her sister, though it was a much lighter shade of brown – it had to be Andromeda.

She passed the baby in her arms over to the man next to her – presumably her husband, Ted – and stretched out her arms to pull Sirius into a huge hug. Remus watched with fierce jealousy, and not a little guilt – he had never seen Sirius so embraced by anyone, let alone a member of his family. Remus made his own way slowly down the stairs, as Mrs Potter entered the hallway now, smiling widely, looking very pleased with herself.

“A good surprise, then?” She asked, as Sirius shook Ted’s hand and tentatively patted the baby’s head.

“You did this?!” Sirius stared at James’s mother in wonder.

“Effie was kind enough to invite us,” Ted smiled, his eyes twinkling. “Pleased to meet you, Sirius. Nice to meet *someone* in Dromeda’s family.”

“Come in, come in!” Mrs Potter ushered the gathering into the hall. They all followed her towards the dining room, Remus last of all.

* * *

Andromeda was the polar opposite to the rest of the Black family – or at least those Remus had so

far met. Though she was as strikingly beautiful as the rest of them, with the same piercing eyes and biting wit, she was full of laughter and merriment. Ted clearly adored her too, and hardly seemed to mind that she left him with the baby most of the time.

‘Dora’ was the strangest infant Remus had ever seen – though, admittedly, he had not met many. She was as cheerful as her mother, with a gummy grin. Her wisps of hair changed from purple to green to blue with each moment, which everyone else seemed to find cute, rather than bizarre.

Before sitting down to eat, they were joined by several other guests – old family friends of the Potters, including, much to Remus’s excitement, old Darius Barebones.

“A toast,” Mr Potter raised his glass rather tipsily at the end of the meal, “To friends, old and new!”

“To the Potters!” Andromeda raised her own glass, “Protectors of outcasts and defenders of black sheep everywhere.”

Everyone laughed and clinked glasses.

“I think I must be the *most* outcast,” Sirius said, happily, “I’m a Gryffindor, after all.”

“To Gryffindor!” Mr Potter called out, from the other end of the table. Only the Gryffindors toasted, Andromeda narrowed her eyes at Sirius,

“Think so, little cousin? Try marrying a non-relative.”

“I’ll have to,” Sirius responded, as Gully cleared away the plates and Mrs Potter fetched in the Christmas pudding, “After Cissy’s wedding there aren’t any Black women left.”

“There’s Dora.”

“Excuse me,” Ted said, protectively covering his daughter’s ears, “Could we please get her through her first Christmas before arranging a betrothal?”

“I’m teasing,” Andromeda leaned over to kiss them both, “Dora can marry anyone she likes when she’s old enough, and I can say with absolute certainty that it won’t be anyone at this table.”

Everyone laughed again. Remus eyed Darius, furtively – he was looking just as merry as Mr Potter, his face glowing red from the fire whisky he’d been knocking back.

Once the pudding was extinguished, served and eaten, crackers pulled and terrible jokes read out, the party adjourned to the living room. Mrs Potter, Philomena and Andromeda went upstairs to change into their party dresses, Mr Potter smoked his pipe and Ted settled Dora down for a nap. The boys settled into a game of snap, before Darius and Mr Potter wrangled everyone into a round of charades. Remus had never played charades before, let alone magical charades, which involved a lot of red and gold sparks – though that may just have been high spirits.

In the evening, more guests began to arrive and the house was soon full of music, laughter and pleasant chatter. Andromeda and Sirius appointed themselves DJs, rifling through their combined record collections and alternating blasting Slade’s *Merry Xmas Everybody* and *I Wish It Could be Christmas Everyday* by Wizzard.

When the snowman brings the snow

Well he just might like to know

He's put a great big smile on somebody's face...

“They’re actually *called* wizard, though,” Sirius kept telling everyone, earnestly, “And just *listen* to it...”

Even Philomena forgot her melancholy for a few hours, getting up and moving to the music along with James, who was just about the same height as her and had no clue how to dance, but was pretty chuffed when she took his hand and showed him how to twist.

Quite sure he would not be missed, Remus slipped between the throngs of people in search of Darius. There must have been a hundred witches and wizards in attendance – some of them teachers at Hogwarts, who Remus did everything to avoid. He heard at least three people murmur that Dumbledore was there, somewhere.

“They’re both Black’s, you know,” he heard one witch whispering to her friend, as they watched Andromeda and Sirius giggling hysterically by the record player, “She’s run off and had a baby with that Tonks chap, and the boy – well he *was* the heir, but I’ve heard Orion is planning to contest it as soon as their younger boy is of age. Quite the little hell raiser, from what I’ve heard.”

“He can’t be any worse than Orion was, I went to school with him. Nasty, vicious kid. Sirius is a ray of sunshine compared to Orion – and don’t get me started on that bitch Walpurga.”

“Shh.” The first witch said, nervously, “You never know who’s listening these days, even at the Potters.”

“Well, what’s he doing here at all, I’d like to know?”

“He’s chums with the Potter boy. You know what Effie and Monty are like – they’ve taken in the Pettigrew’s eldest, too, she’s over there.”

“Yes, I heard about that.”

“Well, it’s no secret at all why *she*’s here – the Pettigrews and the Potters are both pure blood, after all, despite the rumours. Mind you, Effie might want to act quickly – if Philomena sees her chance to bag the Black heir then poor James isn’t going to get a look in, is he? I mean, everybody knows what’s going on; we all need to pick a side. The Potters picked theirs a long time ago, I’m afraid.”

Remus felt his blood boil. It was horrible, hearing his friends spoken about like that – and the Potters, who Remus was absolutely certain had no ulterior motives when it came to their son, *or* the company he kept. They let James be friends with *him*, after all, knowing exactly what he was.

He clenched his fists, wished he was allowed to do magic – do *anything* to shut those mean old bitches up. Sirius and Andromeda were now bawling at the tops of their lungs, joined by James and Philomena:

“Weeeell I wish it could be Christmas every daaaa-aaay!
When the kids start singing and the band begins to plaa-aay
Ooooooh I wish it could be Christmas everyday
So let the BELLS ring OUT for CHRISTmaaaas!”

Remus smiled, and at the same moment, finally caught sight of Darius. The old man was steaming drunk now, leaning heavily on the bannister in the hallway and talking to an old woman who looked like she would very much like to get away from him.

Remus straightened his back and consciously smoothed his features. He’d borrowed a set of James’s smart dress robes for the occasion, and Philomena had kindly performed a cosmetic spell on his scars. As such, he hoped that he’d get away with at least appearing to be the son of a famous

wizard, rather than a muggle brat from a children's home.

"Good evening, Mr Barebones," he said, affecting an accent learnt from three years of listening to James and Sirius's received pronunciation. He held out a hand to the old man, who shook it, looking at him, puzzled, "Remus Lupin – you remember we met last year?"

"Ah, yes! The Lupin boy!"

"That's right," Remus nodded, smiling serenely, keeping his expression controlled. He handed Darius another whisky, as the witch the old man had previously been talking to snuck away. "I believe you knew my father?"

"Lyll Lupin! Best dueller I ever knew! Married a muggle somewhere in Wales, didn't he?"

"That's right," Remus said, steadily, "My mother." He took a careful breath as Darius guzzled more whisky, then cleared his throat, "Did you know Lyall very well?" He found that 'Lyll' was much easier to say than 'my father'.

"Oh, quite well, quite well," Darius nodded enthusiastically, thrilled to have someone to talk to, "Worked under him at the ministry, before all the trouble started. Never knew anyone better with boggarts – or dementors, come to that. The Azkaban liaison office has missed him, I can tell you."

"The trouble?" Remus asked, swiping another glass of whisky from Gully, who hurried past with a tray, and handing it to the old man.

"Thank you, dear boy. Yes, the trouble. Nasty business. Nasty."

"You're talking about... the events that led to Lyall's suicide?" He couldn't say it. Darius had to say it.

"I'm talking about the damned werewolves!" Darius slammed his empty whisky glass down on a nearby sideboard. "Forgive me," he muttered.

"Not at all," Remus replied, unblinking. "Do go on. I know the story, of course. But I'd like to... hear about it from someone who knew him."

Darius surveyed him, carefully, through his whisky-addled haze. He seemed to slump, slightly, before beginning his story.

"We couldn't possibly know, you understand, none of us... well... Lyall was a great wizard – a *great* wizard, you hear me?" He slurred. Remus nodded. "But..." the old man looked upwards, glassy eyed, "Well, he did have a tendency to obsess over things. And that temper! Flew into rages at work – during committee hearings, even."

"Committee hearings?" Remus almost broke character.

"Hasn't your mother told you?" Darius looked at him, surprised, "Bloody muggles, not fit to raise our children, I've said it for years..." He sighed, "Your father was on several committees at the ministry for the regulation and control of magical creatures."

Remus was glad he had taken Care of Magical Creatures, otherwise he might know nothing at all about this. As it was, he was able to nod, knowingly. Darius continued,

"Just his area, of course, he was a giant in the field. But he liked his own way, and he was seen as a bit of an extremist, in those days. Wanted an overhaul of the Werewolf Registry, better

identification and tracking measures. We just didn't have the manpower for it, and resources were better spent elsewhere. And Lupin... he'd been working with dark creatures for so many years, he thought he saw werewolves everywhere – always saw danger where there clearly wasn't any. Honestly, we all thought he was an eccentric, we couldn't have known... when they brought Greyback in, I was there. I saw him, and I don't mind telling you, *none* of us thought he was a threat. Clearly drunk. Confused. A vagrant, that's what we thought. And when Lupin went off on one of his rants about werewolves, well... we didn't think twice."

"You let Greyback go." Remus said, stonily. Darius looked very sorry for himself now, almost weepy. He nodded.

"We let him go. Of course now, now we know... if only we'd listened. Lyall killed himself just after that, didn't even want to hear the committee's apology." He sighed, and looked at Remus again, "I've always wondered what drove him to it, you know. Some say it was the guilt – not being able to stop Greyback. I wouldn't have thought he was the type... and to abandon his family like that, I mean, you couldn't have been much more than a baby?"

"Five." Remus said, "I was five."

"Yes, well." Darius shifted, uncomfortably, looking morosely down at his empty glass, "I have my own little theory about what happened... what if Greyback came after him, eh? We know how dangerous he is, now. We know he hates wizards more than anything else, and your father said some very unpleasant things. So what I wonder is... did Greyback go back and get him? Did he bite him? If that's what happened then... I must say, I don't blame Lyall at all. Only good beast's a dead beast."

"Mm." Remus replied, feeling very hot, and a bit dizzy. "And Greyback?"

"Last I heard, he's in league with you-know-who." Darius shook his head, "And the damned irony of it all is that we need your father more than ever. Still," he smiled at Remus, kindly, "Don't think he died in vain, dear boy. We did end up implementing a lot of his reforms, particularly where half-breeds are concerned. Can't escape the registry now, no sir!" He slammed his wizened old fist down.

"Excuse me." Remus turned, quickly. He had heard enough. "I hear Mrs Potter calling."

He slipped back into the crowd of merrymakers, the music still blaring as Sirius and Andromeda led everyone in chorus:

*"So here it iiiiiiis, Merry Christmas,
Everybody's having fuuuuun!
Loo-ook to the future now,
It's only just begun!"*

Third Year: Confidence

Saturday 5th January 1974

Sheets of rain battered against the Hogwarts Express like a volley of enemy arrows, covering the usually green hillsides in a gauzy veil of mist and drizzle, darkening the sky.

“Feels rubbish going back to school, doesn’t it?” Sirius said sulkily, glaring out of the window.

Remus glanced over at Peter, who was staring at Sirius in disbelief. Sirius didn’t notice. Remus sighed,

“How was your Christmas, Pete?” He asked politely.

“Ok.” Peter replied, dully, “Thanks for the sweets.”

“Seen my broom?” James asked, pulling it down from the luggage rack. Peter got up to look, perking up a bit. Remus rolled his eyes and returned to his book.

He wasn’t really reading it. He hadn’t been able to concentrate properly on a book since the Potter’s Christmas party. In fact, he hadn’t been able to concentrate on anything at all. Not flying, or games, or conversations, or James and Sirius’s animagus planning. So he pretended to read, hoping they’d leave him to it. At St Edmund’s he might have just skulked off by himself into town, but that didn’t seem like a very good way to show gratitude to James’s parents, who were sure to worry.

It was as if there was a list of questions in his head that he had no way of getting the answers to, so they just played on repeat, around and around. Where was Greyback now? Who was ‘you know who’? Had Lyall Lupin hated his son that much?

Remus had already known that his father had killed himself because he’d been bitten. He’d always assumed that Lyall had been motivated by guilt. But now... well, what Remus had been wrong? What if the real reason had been hatred – or even worse – shame?

For the past three years, Remus had been working hard at school, using his father’s wand and taking the subjects his father might have taken. He didn’t think about Lyall *all* the time, but in the back of his mind, it had still meant something. Since the Christmas party, he wasn’t so sure any more. Ferox had said ‘know thyself’, but Remus was failing to see the wisdom in that now. He’d been much happier not knowing.

These dark thoughts were interrupted by a quiet tapping at the carriage door. Marlene poked her head around,

“Hiya McKinnon,” James grinned, “Evans with you?”

“Um... no.” She squeaked, fiddling with her hair nervously, “Sirius, can I talk to you?”

“Me?” Sirius sat up, looking confused, “Er... what is it?”

“Mary um... Mary asked me to tell you something.”

“Tell me what?”

“She’s... I don’t think I was supposed to say it in front of this lot.”

“Er... ok...” Sirius got up and followed her outside into the corridor. The other three exchanged amused looks while they waited. *Ugh*, Remus thought, had he been mistaken about the Mary and Sirius thing?! Was it Sirius and *Marlene*, now?

Moments later, a stunned looking Sirius re-entered the compartment alone.

“Well?” James asked.

“Mary’s got a boyfriend, apparently.” Sirius said, confused.

“You mean... you got dumped?”

“I dunno.” He sat down, scratching his head, “Was I going out with her?”

“Well, apparently she thought you were.”

“Why don’t girls just say what they mean?!” Sirius ran his hand through his hair in a good imitation of James, who nodded in a sympathetic way.

“Girls are a nightmare.” He agreed.

Remus celebrated, inwardly. Thank goodness all of that was behind them.

* * *

Sunday 6th January 1974

He later learnt that Mary had started going out with a muggle boy she knew from home.

“We grew up in the same block,” she confided in him, excitedly, “His flat’s just across from mine. I properly fancied Sirius, and he’s nice and everything, but... well he’s a bit posh. I don’t think he even knows what a council flat is.”

Remus had to agree on that one.

As for himself, he warmed to Mary once again, and didn’t even mind her going on and on about her new boyfriend, and how he’d taken her to the local dance hall, and the pictures, and how her mum loved him, and her dad thought he was a ‘good boy’. Marlene, however, looked terminally bored as they sat around by the fire doing their last bits of holiday homework together.

This did not escape Mary’s notice.

“Don’t be jealous, Marls.”

“I’m not.” Marlene frowned. “I just think you’re being horrible to Sirius.”

“What?!”

“Dumping him like that! You... you hurt his feelings!” Marlene’s cheeks had turned an uncharacteristic shade of pink.

“No, she didn’t,” Remus snorted.

Both girls glared at him, as if he had completely misunderstood.

“Oh my god!” Mary stared at her friend, “Marlene, do *you* fancy Sirius?!”

“No!” Marlene stood up, bright red now, “Oh, you’re such a bitch, Mary!” She stormed up to the girls dorm. Lily sighed, glancing up,

“That wasn’t very nice.” She said, reproachfully.

“Her problem, not mine.” Mary shrugged. “*Does* she fancy Sirius?!”

“Does it matter?”

“I’m going too.” Remus stood up, trying not to heave a sigh.

“Oh no, don’t go, Remus!” Mary said, “We’ll stop talking about boys, I promise.”

“I’m tired,” he lied, “And I’ve finished mine. See you tomorrow.”

As he walked away, he heard Mary whisper, very loudly,

“Oh my god, maybe he fancies Marls!”

Remus reminded himself that he was trying to like Mary again, and didn’t react. He climbed the stairs and went to sit in the dorm room alone. James, Peter and Sirius were all in detention for a prank they had pulled before Christmas.

He wasn’t tired at all. It was two nights before the full moon, and he was beginning to feel the usual tell-tale restlessness in his limbs, the familiar quickening of his heartbeat. Left to his own devices, Remus returned to the troubling thoughts that had been bothering him for weeks. Again, they seemed to just swirl through his brain in a big soupy mess, without beginning or end.

Did all wizards feel the same way as Darius? As Lyall Lupin? Were his father’s actions really justifiable? Remus couldn’t ignore the fact that his mother had also abandoned him – which had to mean something. His friends certainly hadn’t treated him any differently after finding out... but then how could anyone *truly* know what their friends thought of them? The marauders liked anything dangerous; perhaps sharing a room with Remus was simply another exciting risk.

What he really needed was to speak to somebody impartial. James was so lucky, having two parents always willing to listen. Sirius was lucky to have James. Remus wasn’t sure if Peter had problems or not. Probably did. Probably told James too.

There was McGonagall, Remus knew that they were supposed to go to her with their problems. But she was so stern and difficult, and she liked James best anyway. Madam Pomfrey of course; she’d been supportive before. But she wasn’t one to let you feel sorry for yourself; she’d just try to come up with a common-sense solution, or else tell him not to worry so much. Then Dumbledore – but Remus had no idea how to talk to him, and he wasn’t even sure he wanted to.

As far as people who knew the complexities of Remus’s problem, there was also Professor Ferox – Remus was ninety-five percent sure he knew, anyway. He pondered this as an option.

Remus felt a sort of unidentifiable kinship with his Care of Magical Creatures professor. He had a very reassuring presence, and Remus thought he might feel better if he could speak to him, somehow sure that Ferox would lend a sympathetic ear. There was a funny flutter in his stomach, like excitement, and Remus thought that was a good sign. He glanced at the clock in the corner. It was only five o’clock, the other boys wouldn’t be out of detention until six and curfew wasn’t until eight.

Remus pulled the marauder's map from under his pillow. The basic outline of the castle was complete, now; they just needed to finalise the grounds, animate the staircases and add the secret places that only they knew about. Then Sirius's tagging idea could come next, though they still weren't very sure how to go about it. Remus had discovered one spell that would locate a single person, but nothing of the magnitude they required.

Still, he cast his locator spell now, and found that Professor Ferox was walking from the Great Hall to the staff room. Remus got up, quickly – if he was fast, then he could make it look like a chance encounter. He grabbed James's cloak before leaving, just in case Mary and Lily were still in the common room.

He was just reaching for the door knob when he had a sudden flash of sense.

What on earth was he doing? Going to see Professor Ferox – and then what? Whinge to him about his dead father? Cry to him about how nobody would ever understand him, because he was a murderous dark creature with a working-class accent? Moan about how his friends were all going girl mad, and he felt left behind?

Remus retreated back into the room.

What on earth would Ferox think of him? That he was a big wuss, that's what. You couldn't just go crying to teachers whenever something bothered you; you couldn't just expect everyone to feel sorry for you. *No one owes you a happy life*, Matron always said.

He lay on his bed and stared up at the canopy. He felt worse, now. He didn't know what had come over him – he was never normally one to act on impulse – not anymore, not since his first year. He'd just felt so strongly that he ought to see his teacher. Ah! There it was again, that flutter in his midsection. It wasn't excitement at all – it was... well, he wasn't sure yet what it was. He felt hot and flushed and oddly prickly. It was something... animal.

Oh god. Remus let out a groan. It must be the transformation. The wolf was creeping in earlier than usual, maybe. It probably liked the smell of Ferox, or it caught the scent of his kneazle. Did wolves eat cats?

Only good beast's a dead beast. That's what Darius told him. At the time, Remus had felt it was a little unfair... after all, he'd never actually hurt anyone. Dumbledore wouldn't let that happen. He definitely didn't *want* to hurt anyone, either, except occasionally Snape, and that was just *normal*, wasn't it?

Perhaps Remus was more dangerous than he thought he was. He'd learnt to control his temper most of the time now, he'd learnt to control his magic. He just had to learn to control whatever this was, too.

When James, Sirius and Peter returned, Remus had made up his mind.

"I've had a think," he started,

"No wonder you needed a lie down," Sirius smirked. Remus threw a pillow at him.

"Piss off, I'm serious."

"No, *I'm* Siri-"

James slapped him around the head,

“Shut up, Black.”

“Thanks.” Remus smiled. “Er... the whole animagus thing.”

“Yeah?” Sirius looked eager now, still rubbing his head, “Had an idea? I *love* Moony ideas!”

“Um... not exactly,” Remus felt awkward now. Still, it had to be done. He’d made a decision. “I... I don’t want you to do it.”

“Do what?” Peter looked confused.

“He doesn’t want us to become animagi.” James said, looking at Remus with those clear, honest eyes. “Is that right?”

Remus nodded, feeling horribly guilty.

“I’m really grateful, I am. I just... I don’t think any of you really understand how dangerous it would be. I could hurt you. I could... I could kill you. I’ve got no control over it.”

“But it’s going to work!” Sirius protested, “I did all the research, James, did you show him?”

“Leave it, mate,” James said, “It’s Lupin’s decision.”

“Thanks.” Remus smiled at James. He felt terrible for letting them down – but it was for their own good, and he had to be the mature one.

Sirius looked like he wanted to say something else, but James gave him a hard look that was so like Mrs Potter that it silenced the shorter boy at once. They didn’t say much for the rest of the evening, and Remus had to pretend to read his book again.

Later that night, after lights out, Remus heard Sirius creep over to James’s bed and cast the silencing spell for the first time in a long time. He wished they would invite him, just once. He wished he wasn’t always the one left out, he wished he knew how it felt to have a friend as close as James. More than ever, he wanted someone to talk to.

Suddenly overwhelmed, Remus quickly cast his own spell, so the others wouldn’t hear him crying.

Third Year: Davey Gudgeon

Chapter Summary

CW for homophobic slur and a bit of swearing

Winter passed into spring, and as per usual, Remus's birthday was celebrated with creative vigour by the other marauders – the customary singing at every meal time, the cake, presents.

Unfortunately, McGonagall was wise to their antics this year and had a prefect watching the boys' dorms to prevent any further midnight firework displays.

Fortunately, Remus's fourteenth fell on a Hogsmeade weekend, and he felt very grown up indeed spending the afternoon in The Three Broomsticks with his friends. It soon became clear that James and Sirius had somehow bribed all of their classmates to stop by the pub too, as a steady stream of students approached their table wanting to buy Remus a butterbeer or toast his health. By the time the afternoon was over everyone in the bar knew Remus's name, and he was raucously cheered on his way out. Completely embarrassing, of course.

With his birthday out of the way, Remus threw himself into revision in preparation for the upcoming exams – he had a particular urge to do well in his new subjects, not least Care of Magical Creatures. By returning his focus to study and schoolwork, Remus slowly began to put the cruel words of Darius Barebones behind him. Yes, he was dangerous, and yes, once everyone found out what Remus was he would very likely be shunned. But until then, he had an opportunity to learn – and he wasn't going to waste it.

* * *

Sunday 7th April 1974

Remus had never met Davey Gudgeon before – as far as he knew, nor had any of the others. He never found out what the kid looked like, even. But he would remember that name until the day he died.

The whomping willow had been turned into a game during the summer of 1973 by a group of bored first years, and though it was abhorred by Filch and frowned upon by the heads of houses, no one had really said anything about it. Try to see how close you can get to the trunk before the branches took a swipe at you. Remus certainly had no inclination to play. He hated that tree.

As it was, Remus wasn't even there when it happened. It was the day after a full moon, and he was in the hospital wing, as per usual. Peter was sitting on the floor, sorting through his chocolate frog cards, murmuring to himself happily. James was marking Sirius's divination homework, and Sirius was covertly flicking his wand at James behind his back, turning his hair different colours for Remus's amusement. Blue, pink, green, yellow – it was working too; Remus found it hysterically funny, because James looked so serious, and when he was concentrating his tongue poked out between his teeth like a cat.

It was a perfectly pleasant afternoon, and Remus could almost ignore how much his bones and teeth hurt as they settled back into place for another cycle.

But then it happened. The hospital door slammed open, and a student came in shrieking;

“Madam Pomfrey! Madam Pomfrey! Help!”

Nosey as they were, Sirius and James jumped down from the bed to peer around the pale green curtains. Remus sighed, leaning back on his pillow. He was accustomed now to the ebb and flow of the hospital wing; raised voices like that usually meant a spell gone wrong. He tried to ignore it – he resented anything that reminded him he was in a hospital, and not just enjoying a lazy afternoon with his friends.

But James and Sirius remained out of view, watching whatever the scene was unfold, and when they turned back towards the bed their faces were pale and serious. The commotion had grown louder, Remus was dimly aware of someone crying.

“What is it?” He asked, more irritably than he meant to.

Sirius’s mouth twisted and James shook his head, mutely, pushing his glasses up his nose. Peter finally looked up from his cards,

“What?”

“An accident... some kid.” James murmured.

“Everyone out!” Madam Pomfrey’s voice echoed through the chamber, unnaturally loud and clear. The curtain around Remus’s bed parted and she poked her head through, looking distracted, “Remus, dear, if you’re feeling well enough it might be best for you to spend the rest of the afternoon in your own bed. Potter, would you go and fetch Professor Sprout? Tell her that one of her students has been injured.”

James nodded and left immediately, without even glancing back at his friends or his homework. You could always rely on James.

Sirius caught Remus’s eye and Remus nodded his assent, climbing out of bed. He was still in his pyjamas, and Sirius hoiked Peter up by the elbow to give him some privacy. Remus dressed as quickly as he could, shoved his books into his bag, grabbed James’s work and joined his friends on the other side of the curtain. He could smell blood.

Curtains had been drawn around the bed nearest the door, and the three boys hurried past it, wanting nothing more than to escape the unpleasant atmosphere and get as far away as possible. They went straight to the common room, Remus limping slightly, Sirius and Peter slowing down to match his pace.

“What was it?” Remus whispered, “There was blood.”

“Yeah,” Sirius replied, looking shaken, “I dunno what happened but... it was his face.”

Peter looked faintly ill.

They reached the common room and Remus collapsed into an armchair, exhausted.

“You ok?” Sirius asked, anxiously, touching a hand to Remus’s shoulder. Remus nodded, closing his eyes and breathing deeply,

“Fine, fine.” He shrugged Sirius off, embarrassed, wishing he could be normal for once.

“Alright lads,” Mary sauntered into the room, Marlene in tow, “Hear what happened to that Gudgeon kid?”

“No,” Sirius replied, slyly, “What?”

“Whacked in the face by that mental tree.” She said, shaking her cloak off, “They were trying to touch the trunk.”

“The whomping willow?”

“Yeah,” Marlene piped up, “It shouldn’t be allowed! It’s so dangerous!”

“Did you see it happen?!” Remus asked, trying to keep the panic out of his voice.

“Nope,” Mary shrugged, flinging herself down on the couch next to Sirius, “Heard it from one of the second-year girls.”

“They’ll have to get rid of it!” Marlene said, shrilly. “Dumbledore can’t leave it there now. Someone could be killed.”

“He should have stayed away from it.” Sirius said, frowning, “It’s a stupid game. Everyone knows what that tree’s like.”

“Have I gone mad?” Mary laughed, “Sirius Black, the voice of reason?!”

“Piss off, MacDonald,” Sirius scowled.

Remus was starting to get a headache. He rubbed his temple and closed his eyes again, shrinking down into the armchair. Guilt crept up his spine, hot and cold pinpricks. It hit him in the *face*?! Would this Gudgeon boy be ok? Surely Madam Pomfrey would be able to fix it, whatever it was. She could fix anything.

* * *

Gossip about Davey Gudgeon flooded the school in a matter of hours, until no one could escape it. Sarah Saunders from Ravenclaw told everyone that she’d seen his parents arrive, then march straight to Dumbledore’s office, looking furious. Gudgeon’s friends in Hufflepuff relayed the story over and over for anyone who’d listened – that it had seemed as though Davey would actually reach the trunk this time, but then the willow lashed out at the very last minute. They heard varying accounts of the damage – that the tree had cracked his skull in two, that he had lost both his eyes, or even that he had *actually died* and the school was covering it up.

Marlene, who seemed more distressed than anyone else about the whole thing, enlisted Lily and Mary’s help in drawing up a petition to have the whomping willow removed from the school premises. Remus signed it – he couldn’t think of a good enough reason not to.

Sirius refused.

“That tree has just as much right to be here as anybody.” He said, firmly, as Marlene chased him with a quill.

“But Sirius,” she pleaded, “It’s *dangerous*.”

“So are bludgers!” He returned, dodging her, “You going to leave the quidditch team?”

“It’s hardly the same thing!”

“Ugh, just sign it, Black,” Lily groaned, trying to finish her Runes homework, “What’s it to you?”

“It’s the principle!” He crossed his arms, firmly. Lily rolled her huge green eyes.

“Tosser.” She muttered under her breath, “Can’t he see how upset Marls is?”

“Why *is* she so upset?” Remus asked, in a whisper, when Marlene was out of earshot. “Did she know Davey?”

“Don’t think so,” Lily sighed, “I think she just wants a project to take her mind off stuff at home. Family, you know.”

Remus thought about this. He didn’t know Marlene as well as he’d got to know Lily and Mary. Mary was so outgoing, and would chat to anyone. (In fact, if anything she was a bit of an oversharer. Remus knew far too much about her snogging preferences for his liking.) Marlene had always been the quieter, shyer one – less sure of herself, even in the areas she excelled. He didn’t know very much about her family simply because it never occurred to him to ask about people’s families.

He didn’t think the petition would really go anywhere. Dumbledore had given a speech prohibiting anyone from going near the whomping willow again, and that was all that had been said on the matter. The staff were clearly uneasy, and Remus had just been trying to keep his head down.

The other marauders hadn’t said anything to him about it, and changed the subject whenever it came up. Usually Remus preferred not to discuss anything related to his ‘furry little problem’, but now he was beginning to wonder whether they secretly blamed him after all. James would never say it out loud, of course – Peter might. Sirius might say so and then instantly take it back. Either way, none of them said a word, leaving Remus’s imagination to run wild.

A week after the incident, Professor Sprout confirmed the rumour; Davey Gudgeon was now blind, and would not be returning to Hogwarts for quite some time. Remus had been trying to avoid Sprout since it had happened – as Herbology teacher, he was sure that she knew exactly what the whomping willow was doing on the grounds in the first place.

“His parents are taking him to America, where there are advances being made in ocular healing potions.” The dumpy professor explained at breakfast. “I am sure Davy and his family are very grateful for all of your well wishes.”

Remus felt a horrible sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. When Marlene, Lily, Mary, and a few other students got up to present their petition – which had over four hundred signatures, now, - Remus went with them.

Professor Sprout accepted the petition and promised to discuss the matter with Dumbledore. She even awarded Marlene ten house points for her efforts.

“They’re not going to get rid of it, though,” Sirius said, later that evening when the marauders were all alone in their room.

“No, I doubt it,” Remus kicked a stray sock under his bed, hands in his pockets.

“So why did you go up?”

Remus shrugged,

“Felt like the right thing to do. I mean. Marlene’s right – the tree’s dangerous. Shouldn’t be at a

school.”

“But...” Peter started.

“I know.” Remus snapped. “I know, ok?”

“You shouldn’t feel guilty, mate,” James said, kindly, “Gudgeon shouldn’t have been mucking around like that... it’s not your fault—”

“If it’s anyone’s fault,” Remus said darkly, “Then it’s mine.”

“That’s stupid.” Sirius said, bluntly, shaking his head, “You didn’t plant it, did you? I dunno if it’s escaped everyone else’s attention, but this school is not exactly safety conscious. It’s built next to a bloody forest full of creatures more dangerous than a flipping *tree*, there’s supposed to be a *literal monster* lying dormant somewhere directly below us, and – not being funny – but have you *seen* Hagrid?!”

“What’s your point, Black?” Remus sighed, heavily, sitting down. His hip hurt if he stood up for too long. He was getting to be like an old woman.

“I dunno,” Sirius shrugged, “Shit happens? Don’t blame yourself? Stop moping?”

“Moping?!” Remus growled, his temperature rising, “Fuck off. There’s a kid who *can’t see* because I’m too dangerous to be at school! Try telling Marlene what I am, I bet she’d get a lot more signatures on THAT petition.”

“You’re not dangerous!”

“You don’t know what I am.” Remus hissed.

“You’re our friend.” James said, suddenly. Remus stared at him. It was a stupid, soppy, dramatic thing to say. But that was half of the problem with James – he so embodied those unrealistic values of loyalty, justice, and honour, that he forced you to believe in them too. He sat next to Remus on the bed. “You’re our friend, and that’s the most important thing, ok?”

He met Remus’s glare and stared back, smiling. “Ok?” He said.

Remus continued to glare, and James inched closer, so that their knees knocked together, “Ok?!” He said, leaning forward now, his nose centimetres from Remus’s. Remus knew this tactic – James did the same thing sometimes to cheer Sirius up. He never blinked – it was highly unnerving, and finally Remus laughed, ducking away,

“Ok! Ok!”

James laughed too and threw his arms around Remus,

“Thank goodness! We couldn’t lose you, Moony!” He cried. Suddenly, Sirius and Peter followed suit, piling onto Remus, who found himself at the bottom of a very giggly scrum.

Laughing, despite himself, Remus tried to squirm out from under them,

“Get off me you bunch of poofs!”

“Ahh, you love us really,” Sirius patted his head.

Third Year: Marlene

“So, summer?” James asked, over butterbeers in the Three Broomsticks on their last Hogsmeade weekend before exams.

Sirius and Remus groaned in unison.

“You *know* I can’t—” Remus started,

“They’ll *never* let me.” Sirius finished.

“I don’t see why, though,” James replied, innocently. “You both came for Christmas.”

“Yeah, but there’s some rule about me staying at St Edmund’s for the whole summer,” Remus shrugged. “While I’m there, I have to follow muggle law. You don’t get to visit anyone when you’re in care, unless they’re related.”

“And you know what my lot are like.” Sirius sighed, heavily. “Even after Christmas – and I think that was just to keep me out of the way, to be honest. Reg already told me I’m expected.”

“When did you speak to Regulus?” James looked up, surprised. Sirius shifted slightly on his stool, looking awkward,

“Er... the other day. Wasn’t worth mentioning, only saw him for a minute.”

“*I’ll* be there all summer, James,” Peter said, loudly.

Sirius rolled his eyes rather obviously, but James smiled and patted Peter’s knee,

“Yeah, great, mate – least I’ll have you, eh?”

“I might be able to swing a Diagon Alley trip,” Sirius said, perking up slightly, “I’ve thought about it, and if you brought the invisibility cloak then we *might* be able to work something out...”

The three of them began to chat excitedly about this plan – Remus let them. Ever since he’d put a stop to the animagus initiative the marauders had been at a bit of a loose end. They needed something to use their creative energy on, and it generally had to be at least mildly illegal.

“Moony,” James said suddenly, “Where is St. Edmund’s, exactly?”

“Epping Forest,” Remus supplied, promptly, “Why?”

“We could always come and visit you...”

“No.” Remus said this with such forcefulness that Sirius and Peter’s heads snapped up, alarmed. Remus swallowed dryly, “Just don’t, ok? It’s a bad idea.”

His insides churned – the humiliation he would feel when his friends saw how he lived; where he came from. It would be too much to bear. What would they say when they saw his dull grey muggle clothes, or the other boys’ rough faces and hard knuckles? The concrete blocks and the splintering portakabins and the scrubby patch of grass out front. They would pity him.

“I’ll write,” he said, hurriedly, hoping to allay them, “And you lot can tell me everything you get up to. Hopefully I can come to yours again at Christmas, Potter.”

“You might not,” Sirius said, suddenly, “Full moon’s on the twenty-ninth this December.”

Remus looked at him, oddly. He prided himself in having an excellent memory, but Sirius took the cake when it came to the moon cycles.

James laughed,

“How come you’ve memorised every bloody full moon until we’re fifty, but you can’t get above an ‘Acceptable’ in Astronomy?!”

“Some things are important to remember, some things aren’t,” Sirius shrugged, draining his tankard, “And messing up the constellations really annoys my parents. So.”

* * *

Mid-May, 1974

Remus yawned and closed his book. He’d done plenty. More than enough. Too much, if you were to ask Sirius. But then, it was all very well if you were lucky enough to have wealthy dead relatives. Someone with Remus’s prospects couldn’t afford to slack off.

The library was open for extended hours during the exam period, but even so, it was almost closing time, with only a few much older students left behind, blinking sleepily at their texts. Lily, Mary and Marlene had gone to bed at least an hour ago – or Remus thought so, anyway. The days had become very repetitive in the lead up to the end of term, and time no longer felt truly linear – he hadn’t even been outside in days.

Wearily, he stood up, rubbing his eyes, and carried a pile of books back towards the Study of Magical Creatures shelves. He’d found that he could stay on Pince’s good side if he tidied up after himself, and it wasn’t much effort.

He liked being in the library late – it was nice and quiet. Growing up in a boy’s home and sharing a bedroom with the marauders had given Remus precious few opportunities for peace and quiet.

As he turned around the final row of stacks, he caught sight of a small figure slumped at the end, fast asleep over a little single desk. Tip-toeing forward, he recognised the fan of blonde hair splayed over the pages of an open book.

“Marlene,” he whispered, as he got closer. “Marlene!” He tapped her shoulder gently.

She jumped violently, fast enough to give Remus whiplash, then stared about with confused, bleary eyes.

“Remus?”

“You fell asleep,” he explained, keeping his voice low, “Library’s closing soon.”

“Oh no!” She looked distraught, gazing down at her parchment, which was blank. She’d smeared a bit of ink at the top, but nothing more. “Oh no.” she said again, forlorn.

“It’s ok,” Remus tried to cheer her up, “You obviously needed the rest, eh? Still some time before exams start.”

“I’ve got so much revision to do! I can’t remember anything about crups, can you?”

“Come on,” Remus dodged the question, “We’d better go, or Pince’ll be after us.”

Marlene nodded dazedly and got up, letting him lead her out through the maze of bookshelves. As they left, she began muttering to herself,

“Crups have forked tails, are wary of muggles, and somewhat resemble cocker spaniels.”

“Jack Russell’s.” Remus corrected, without thinking.

“What? Really?! Are you sure??” The girl grabbed his arm, unreasonably panicked by this information.

“Er... yeah,” Remus said, reeling back, unable to get away from Marlene’s vice-like grip.

“Of course you’re sure!” She said, woefully, finally letting him go, “You’re the best in the class.”

“You’re very good too...” Remus began, but stopped. Marlene’s face crumpled and she burst into tears.

“I can’t do it! I’m going to fail everything!” She wailed, loudly.

A group of Slytherin’s passing by snickered at her, before Remus pointed his wand menacingly at them. Marlene, still weeping, threw herself at Remus, arms around his neck as she sobbed onto his shoulder. Taken aback, Remus tried to pat her, gently, as her tiny body shook against him. He’d never been hugged by a girl before – except James’s mum, and that was hardly the same thing. He didn’t like it. His shoulder was getting wet.

Marlene was completely oblivious to his awkwardness, however, “I’m so rubbish!” She sniffed, “I mess up everything, I’m never going to be as good as Danny, or mum, or you, or Lily...”

“Er... you’re better than Mary at—”

“But Mary’s got a boyfriend and everyone fancies her and no one likes me!” She cried even harder.

At this point, Remus decided that he was definitely in over his head. He patted her, awkwardly once more, and said,

“I’ll um... go and get Lily, shall I?”

“No, no it’s ok...” Marlene pulled away, still sniffing. Her usually pale face was now red and blotchy, her grey eyes still glistening. “I’ll just go and wash my face,” she gestured towards the nearest girl’s loos, “Will you wait for me?”

“Um... ok.”

She disappeared and Remus slumped heavily against the wall. He now found himself carrying both of their book bags, and his shoulders ached under the weight. What might the others do, in this situation? James would be chivalrous, obviously. He probably would have known exactly what to say to stop her from crying. Peter would never get himself in the situation in the first place. Sirius... well Remus thought Sirius was probably as bad as he was, actually. He wasn’t good with emotions; he could barely manage his own.

Still, Remus knew that the right thing was to wait and walk her back to the common room, so he did. It wasn’t that Remus didn’t feel sympathetic towards Marlene – the pressure on everyone felt enormous, you could hardly ignore it. It was more Remus’s general distaste for whinging. And of course he’d never liked being around people who cried; it made him nervous.

Marlene looked much better when she came out of the bathroom. A bit flushed, but at least she was calm.

“Sorry,” she smiled at him, shyly, “I feel silly.”

“S’ok.” Remus shrugged. He wondered if he could give her back her bag now. His arms really hurt and his dodgy knee was playing up – never mind his hip. No, probably not. Not a very James thing to do, make a girl carry her own stuff. She didn’t offer to take it back, either. Luckily, they weren’t too far from Gryffindor tower.

“I am being silly,” she said, as they walked, “I know I am – my stepdad hates it when I get wound up. Says it winds him up. Then mum gets the worst of it. Danny says I need to toughen up and stop acting like a baby, but...”

“Who’s Danny?” Remus asked, a bit lost.

“My brother,” she sounded surprised, “I’m sure I’ve mentioned him. He’s a beater for the Chudley Cannons.”

“Oh right, yeah I did know that.” Remus nodded, “Must be why you’re so good.”

“I’m not as good as Danny.”

“Well.” Remus tried to shrug under the weight of the books, “You’re only fourteen. Bet your brother wasn’t as good at fourteen. You beat Sirius, and he’s really good.”

“Do you really think so?”

“Yeah,” Remus replied, casually. “Obviously. Gryffindor won the cup again this year, didn’t they?”

“Because of *James*.”

“Yeah, well James is mental, you don’t want to be like James.”

“You won’t tell Mary what I said, will you?”

“Nope.” He had already forgotten what she’d said about Mary, to be honest.

“She’s my best friend,” Marlene sniffed, “And I’m not jealous of her or anything, she’s just... well she likes to show off, you know. She’s so funny and chatty and everything, sometimes I feel a bit... I mean, she’s already been out with Sirius and now she’s got that muggle boyfriend, *and* I think Professor Ferox likes her more than me.”

“He’s a *teacher*.” Remus said, “He likes everyone the same. Anyway, you’re funny. James is always going on about how you get everyone laughing at quidditch practice.”

“Really?!” She seemed to flush again at this news. “What about... um... what about Sirius, does he think I’m funny?”

“Yeah, obviously,” Remus nodded, pleased that she was finally smiling again, “We all do. Your impression of McGonagall is the best.”

This seemed to satisfy her, and by the time they’d reached the common room Marlene looked positively cheerful. “I’ll help you with crups if you want.” Remus said, as they climbed through the portrait hole. “We can do it tomorrow at lunch.”

“Thanks Remus.” Marlene wrapped her arms around him again in a quick hug. She took her books and headed upstairs to her dorm room. Remus let out another sigh, sagging slightly with relief. Why did this always happen to him? Maybe he needed to start being meaner.

Behind him, someone wolf-whistled, loudly. He didn’t need to turn around to know who it was.

“Here he comes! Look out, ladies, Gryffindor’s number one heartthrob, coming through!” Sirius crowed as Remus went over to join his friends by the fire. James was immersed in a book, but looked up and winked at Remus. “You’re going to have to tell us your secret, Moony,” Sirius continued, “You seem to get all the girls.”

“She’s just a friend and you know it. Where’s Pete?”

“Showering,” James replied, “Peeves attacked him with a jug of yesterday’s custard.”

“Eurgh.”

“Yep, that’s the sound he made,” James smirked, returning to his book.

“Thank merlin you’re back,” Sirius addressed Remus, “James has been so boring today.”

“I’m revising,” James said, calmly, turning a page, “You should be too.”

“Pfft.”

“I’m done revising for today,” Remus grinned, “Want a game of snap?”

“Have I told you lately how much I love you?”

“Shut up and get the cards.”

Third Year: Greyback

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*You're too old to lose it, too young to choose it
And the clock waits so patiently on your song
You walk past a café, but you don't eat when you've lived too long
Oh, no, no, no, you're a rock 'n' roll suicide.*

Friday 28th June, 1974

Unsurprisingly, Sirius achieved obscenely high marks in everything except Astronomy without lifting so much as a finger to study. By this point, Remus wasn't sure if Sirius genuinely did have some strange pureblood gift, or if he was just an unrecognised genius. Remus didn't mind either way – he himself came top in Care of Magical Creatures, Runes and History of Magic – second highest in Arithmancy, after Sirius.

“Nicely done, kid!” Ferox slapped him on the back at breakfast, the morning after results came out. “My best student.”

“Thanks, professor,” Remus grinned, feeling dizzy with pleasure.

“I’ve a few books you might like to borrow over the summer – pop up to my office before you leave, eh?”

“Teacher’s pet!” Sirius teased, as the tall, jovial man walked away, whistling a jaunty tune. Remus didn’t respond – he was too pleased with himself.

“Can’t believe that’s it ‘til fourth year now.” James said, cleaning his glasses on his robes.

“Do you have to keep reminding me?” Sirius moaned, setting down his knife and fork.

“Plenty to do over the summer,” James replied, “It’ll fly by.”

“What are you doing over the summer?” Remus asked, suspiciously.

“Planning next year’s pranks, obviously,” Sirius said, a little bit too quickly. “Got to keep ahead of the curve, Remu my boy, we’ve a reputation to maintain.”

It was the last official day of term, so Remus decided ignore the fact that this was clearly a lie. He had all summer to be paranoid about the other three leaving him out; there was no need to worry yet.

After breakfast, he wanted to go straight to see Professor Ferox, but thought that might come across a bit too eager – plus, the other three would surely want to come with him, and Remus couldn’t stand the thought of Ferox meeting Sirius and James. He would no doubt be charmed by their natural born charisma, and wonder why he’d ever thought Remus was special at all.

The foursome went upstairs and packed – that is, James, Remus and Peter packed. Sirius bounced around the room trying to distract them, sending books and clothes flying, flicking his record player on and off.

“It’s getting done whether you like it or not,” James chastised, hands on his hips in a very good imitation of his mother.

“You’ll do it for me, like last year,” Sirius replied, standing on his bed and attempting to do pull-ups hanging off the bed frame. The ancient wooden beams creaked.

Remus closed his own trunk. His corner of the room looked very bare without the usual chaos of books, papers, quills and clothes strewn about it. He went over to the record player to have one last fond caress of his favourite album covers. Summers were so quiet, without Sirius’s music. Matron only ever liked to have the radio on once a week – for the Radio 3 Choral Evensong.

“Moony,” James said, suddenly, “Don’t you have to go and see Madam Pomfrey?”

“Er... yeah, but not right now...” Remus looked up, surprised.

“Well, I mean if you’ve finished packing, you may as well, right? When I’ve done Sirius’s stuff I was going to suggest we all go out for a go on our brooms, and you hate flying, so...”

“Oh, really? Ok then.” Remus nodded, feeling unaccountably hurt. It wasn’t at all like James to chase you out of the room.

“We’ll see you at dinner, right Moony?” Sirius asked, swinging forward and landing on his feet with the agility of a gymnast.

“Yeah, I s’pose...” Remus left the room, feeling as if he was being escorted from a party to which he was not invited. Fair enough, he didn’t like flying much. But that didn’t usually matter – often he’d sit in the stands and read his book while the others mucked about in the air. He wouldn’t have minded doing that this time.

He *did* have to see Madam Pomfrey, anyway, so he went to the hospital wing, struggling to shake off the nasty feeling of exile.

* * *

“You’re very quiet, dear,” the medi-witch commented as she completed his end of year checks. “Not looking forward to your holidays?”

“No, not really,” he replied.

“You’ll miss your friends,” she clucked her tongue sympathetically. “It’s a shame, I know. Still, I expect you’ve got lots of muggle pals to play with.”

Remus didn’t bother answering. Madam Pomfrey was very kind, and hadn’t a bad bone in her body, but she – like most adults – could be incredibly dense. He was privately hoping that the coming summer would be just as lucrative as the last – if Craig was still about then perhaps he could make a bit of cash. He’d proved himself capable, he might even ask for more than just cigarettes.

She gave him the same instructions as the year before – eat well, exercise and rest.

“I’ll see you in early July,” she smiled serenely, and he was comforted with the thought that at least he wouldn’t be completely isolated from the wizarding community.

That being dealt with, Remus considered returning to the dormitory. Perhaps they were all finished talking about him, or whatever it was they needed him out of the way for. Perhaps they’d gone

flying already. He didn't begrudge them that; James was of the opinion that if Sirius was in a temper, or too wound up, then a good hour's exercise was the best thing (and it generally was). Plus, it was one of the few times Peter did not get left out. Despite his clumsiness on land, Pettigrew was a surprisingly good flyer. No doubt a result of James's relentless drilling.

It was really the perfect time to go and see Professor Ferox, of course, but Remus dawdled. He felt suddenly quite shy, never having been to see a teacher alone before – unless he was in trouble, of course. Walking slowly, he eventually had to make a directional choice at a particular corridor, and decided he may as well get it over with.

He knocked tentatively on Ferox's office door, even though it was slightly ajar. His heart hammered in his chest and he found himself half hoping that his teacher wasn't there after all. Remus couldn't help but recall with some embarrassment how only a few weeks ago he had almost come running to Ferox in a moment of panic, only to recognise that it was a terrible idea at the very last minute.

"Come in!" Ferox's cheery voice echoed from inside the room. Remus squared his shoulders and entered. "Mr Lupin!" Ferox boomed.

He was not sitting at his desk – Remus didn't think he'd ever seen Ferox seated, except at mealtimes, he was always moving. Just now, he was packing a small trunk, Achilles the kneazle watching quietly from the windowsill. Even after a year of lessons with Ferox, Remus was still somewhat in awe of his teacher. His gigantic presence had not diminished, his mane of sandy curls was still as glorious, his face still heroic with decisively carved features.

"Hello, sir," Remus smiled as he entered, closing the door behind himself. "You asked to see me?"

"Indeed I did," Ferox smiled broadly, nodding to a pile of five books on his desk, "Those are for you, if you've room in your trunk. Next year's set text and a few other things I thought might interest you."

Remus approached the desk and fingered the leather-bound tomes carefully,

"Thank you, professor," he said, quietly. He'd never received such an enormous gift before. Ferox nodded, sitting down, finally, gesturing that Remus do the same.

"Butterbeer?" He withdrew some bottles from the bottom draw of his desk.

"Thank you, professor," Remus repeated, accepting the bottle and sitting down.

Achilles, on the window ledge, stretched, yawned, then curled up to sleep, peacefully. Remus felt he ought to say something else. "Dumbledore normally sends me my books and stuff." He offered, "You didn't have to."

"Well, I know you're a bit out of the loop during the holidays, so I thought you might appreciate a head start." Ferox continued to smile his big easy smile.

Remus felt a strange kind of warmth fizzing in his abdomen. Which was odd, because he hadn't so much as sipped his butterbeer yet.

"Kind of you." He said, looking down at the books again, uncomfortable with too much eye contact.

"I'm not being charitable, Remus, I promise," Ferox said, reassuringly, "I know what it's like, y'see. I came to Hogwarts with almost as little as you did. Muggleborn – raised by my Nan.

‘Course, she never understood anything I did here. Bless her heart.”

Remus blinked. This was interesting news – he had assumed that most of the teachers at Hogwarts – in fact, most of the adults he respected – were all purebloods. It was an immense relief to learn that this wasn’t the case.

“Us rough kids have to stick together, eh?” Ferox winked at him.

“Yeah,” Remus continued to nod, emphatically. “So, you never had a problem getting a job or stuff like that? After school?”

“Well, there are always going to be folks who can’t see past your blood status, no matter who you are,” Ferox said, a wry smirk in his voice, “But you learn pretty quick how to prove ‘em wrong. Well; I don’t need to tell you.”

“No.” Remus agreed. He took a swig of his butterbeer. “So... are you an orphan too, professor?”

“I am. Common as muck, too, you wouldn’t believe the flack I got for this accent back then.”

“Mary and Marlene think you sound like Paul McCartney.” Remus said. Ferox laughed, a great, joyful, wheezing laugh,

“I’ll have to remember that one next time I’m on the pull.”

Remus felt himself blushing, hearing Ferox talk like that.

“Just goes to show,” Ferox said, “You never know how other people are going to see you. So never assume, eh?”

Remus looked up at him, curiously, but gave a small nod of understanding. The professor’s expression softened. “Remus,” Ferox said, so gently that it was unnerving, “I... there’s something else I wanted to talk to you about.”

Remus winced – he thought he knew what was coming. He’d been waiting for it since before Christmas. “Perfectly fine if you don’t want to talk about it,” the teacher said.

“Is it about... my problem?”

“In a manner of speaking,” Ferox said, in a measured tone. “I don’t know if you know this, but I knew your father, Lally, quite well.”

Remus almost choked on his butterbeer. He hadn’t quite expected that. Ferox continued, “Our work often overlapped, you see – I was young, hadn’t long started in the Control of Magical Creatures department. I knew him by reputation, of course, so I tried to learn what I could, though I never did master boggarts quite like he did.”

“Ok.” Remus didn’t know what else to say.

“Do you know much about him?”

“I...” Remus looked away, out of the window. He didn’t think he could talk and look at Ferox at the same time. “He was a Ravenclaw,” he started, as if ticking off items on a list, “He was good at duelling. He was good at boggarts and dementors and poltergeists, and he hated werewolves, he wanted them all dead and he...” Remus choked, wanting to stand up and leave the room.

“Where did you hear all of that?” Ferox looked shocked. Remus looked at him, though everything

was swimming in tears now. It felt as though all of the nasty, spiteful thoughts he'd been having since December had come pouring out like poison.

"Darius Barebones." He said, rubbing his eyes roughly on the sleeves of his robes, forcing himself under control. "Met him at the Potter's Christmas party."

"That old pisshead." Ferox snapped, gruffly. He looked annoyed, but not at Remus. "I'm so sorry, Lupin, what a thing to hear. It's not true, you know."

"He didn't hate... them?"

"Well," Ferox tilted his head, as if trying to be diplomatic, "He was concerned about the danger werewolves pose to society. But he was a sensible man, too sensible for hatred. You're a lot like him."

Remus snorted bitterly at that.

"It's true." Ferox said, firmly. "He was a good man. He'd do anything for anyone."

"Darius said he thought Lyall was bitten by Greyback, that's why he killed himself."

"You know about Greyback, then?"

Remus nodded. Ferox looked very serious indeed. "I've heard that rumour. Wouldn't be surprised if Dumbledore started it to protect you, to be honest. Personally, I never believed it. Then I met you of course, and it all became clear."

"Is it that obvious?" Remus asked, raising his fingers to the scar on his face, over a year old now, but still stark and red.

"No," Ferox shook his head, "Most wizards wouldn't know a werewolf if it..."

"Jumped up and bit them?"

Ferox laughed, lifting the dark mood that had settled over the bright little office.

"Your father's sense of humour, too."

Remus smiled, weakly.

"Professor?"

"Yes?"

"What happened to Greyback?"

Ferox instantly turned serious again.

"I'm afraid we don't know for certain. He's still alive, as far as the ministry is concerned, and still wanted for his crimes. I don't know if they'll ever catch him, to be honest, the man's a maniac, by all accounts."

"Could he... find me?"

"Maybe."

Remus was startled by Ferox's honesty. He didn't seem as concerned as most adults about protecting him from the harsher truths. "Does that frighten you?" The teacher asked.

Remus shrugged.

"I think... I think maybe I've always known that. That I'm going to meet him again."

"You mustn't go looking..."

"I won't." Remus knew that was a lie, but he also knew that there was nothing Ferox could do to stop him.

"If you have more questions, I want you to feel comfortable asking me." Ferox said, "There are some old newspaper clippings inside that top book," he nodded at the pile he'd gifted Remus, "I thought you ought to have them. Things like that oughtn't to be kept from people, and you're old enough."

"Thank you, professor."

"I haven't upset you?"

"No, professor."

"Good lad." Ferox stood up, leaned over the desk and squeezed Remus's shoulder in a friendly sort of way. "Try and have a good summer, eh? I'll see you in September."

Remus nodded, feeling a bit dazed by the events of the past half an hour. Nonetheless, he was quite grateful to be dismissed, and quietly left, carrying the heavy pile of books back upstairs to the common room.

It was very quiet in Gryffindor tower now. Most of the students had finished their packing and were no doubt outside enjoying the grounds. Remus's thoughts turned to Davy Gudgeon, and he squashed that down. One emotional crisis at a time.

The marauders were gone too, Sirius's things now neatly packed away in his serpent chest. The room was stuffy and hot, Remus flicked his wand to swing the windows open, then went to sit on his bed and open the first book.

Sure enough, pressed like dead leaves between the inside cover and the front page, three yellowing newspaper clippings:

The Daily Prophet, April 1964

WEREWOLF ATTACKS ON THE RISE – could your children be next?

The Ministry of Magic has today confirmed that the recent spate of murders both in the muggle and wizarding communities is the work of dark creatures – namely werewolves. Ministry officials are particularly concerned that in many cases the victims of the attacks have been children under the age of ten.

One official, respected dark creatures expert Lyall Lupin, has spoken out and criticised the ministry for "Lax and wilfully neglectful safety measures". Lupin claims that the ministry's current werewolf registry is poorly managed and maintained, enabling certain anti-ministry factions to use

these loopholes to their advantage.

The current number of victims is suspected to be seventeen, but set to rise as the investigation continues, and the perpetrators continue to allude capture. A statement from the Auror's office is expected later today.

The Daily Prophet, Obituaries, January 1965

Lyall Lupin, who has died aged 36, will be remembered as a world-renowned expert on non-human spirituous apparitions, for his extensive work with boggarts and poltergeists, dementor liaisons, and, more recently, his efforts to reform the national werewolf registry.

Lupin is survived by his wife, muggle Hope Lupin, who he married in Cardiff in 1959. The couple have a young son, Remus John Lupin, born in 1960. The family has requested privacy during their time of grief.

The Daily Prophet, February 1965

AURORS ON LOOKOUT FOR GREYBACK

The Auror's Office is appealing to the wizarding public for any information pertaining to the whereabouts of Fenrir Greyback, werewolf and suspected child murderer.

Greyback is described as 6'3, very strong, and unclean, with the appearance of a vagrant. Wizards and witches are warned not to approach him, and to consider Greyback extremely dangerous, even in human form. Auror Alastor Moody today made a statement indicating that the ministry believe Greyback to be travelling with a pack of werewolves, making him all the more dangerous. Greyback is known to have a preference for small children, but Moody declined to comment on speculation that the werewolves plan to raise an army.

The ministry also declined to respond to allegations that they had Greyback in their custody last spring, and failed to recognise the threat.

Since the death of Lyall Lupin, an outspoken advocate for harsher sanctions on werewolves, there have been numerous efforts to improve recognition and registration of dark creatures.

The first time he read them, Remus didn't even use his reading aid. The second, third and fourth times, he did. And over and over, as if there was something more in them, as if he could suck the truth right out. He had no more answers than before, and a hot, angry ball of rage had begun growing inside his chest, burning brighter as he re-read and re-read.

Hours passed, the room grew dark, and in the end he never went down to the feast.

Chapter End Notes

British slang dictionary:

'On the pull' - out looking for a date/chatting people up

'Pisshead' (piss-head) - a heavy drinker/alcoholic

Summer, 1974

Chapter Summary

Remus reaches tipping point.

Warnings - mention of violence, petty crime, underage drinking. Some swearing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Moony,

Hope everything's going ok with you this summer.

Things are weird here – my parents aren't even that interested in disciplining me anymore, they just keep attending all these meetings. Sometimes they're at ours, sometimes they go out – I think they go to Bellatrix's place, maybe. Or the Malfoy's. Regulus won't tell me what goes on – I think they've probably put a *lips locked* spell on him or something, because normally he couldn't resist lording something like that over me.

I feel like something bad is going to happen. I know that sounds stupid, but something's definitely not right in this house. Sometimes I'm glad you and James and Peter are all such a long way away.

I'm going to try and ask to stay with James again. I know it's mental, but honestly, if they're just going to ignore me anyway, what's the point? I haven't even been asked to be an usher at Cissy's wedding (all the better, to be honest) so there's always the possibility that they've disinherited me and just forgotten to mention it.

I can't wait until we're all seventeen, then we can just live together all the time, like at Hogwarts. I want to live on Carnaby Street, like in *Melody Maker*. You'll have to show me around – I know how the money works now, thanks to Muggle Studies.

Best,

Sirius O. Black.

* * *

Sirius,

Everything's ok here, don't worry about me.

I don't really know what you mean by 'something bad'. Do you think they're going to try to hurt you again? If you do, then definitely try and go to the Potters. Maybe they can tell Dumbledore or someone.

Sorry to disappoint you, but I've never been to Carnaby Street. St Edmund's is in Essex, and we only go into London once a year, usually to the museums. You'd probably like the Science Museum, full of muggle inventions.

Be careful, ok?

Remus.

* * *

Dear Moony,

Just so you know, Sirius is coming to stay with us this summer. He should be arriving this afternoon, so send his post here. Hope your summer is going well? You seemed a bit off at the end of term.

I know you're going to say no, but Mum and Dad still say you're invited to stay whenever you like. And we could always come to you, just to visit. Don't want you to be alone out there, mate, especially these days.

James.

* * *

James,

What do you mean 'these days'? Is this what Sirius was on about with his family meetings? You know what the Blacks are like, they just love secrets. It's probably nothing. They're probably planning Regulus's betrothal or something like that and want Sirius out of the way.

Anyway, like I told Sirius, don't worry about me. Dumbledore and Madam Pomfrey reckon this is where I'm safest, and they're the ones in charge of me, right? Obviously I would rather spend the summer at yours, but it's not happening, so can you please drop it?

Don't come here, either, just trust me.

R.

* * *

Dear Remus,

Sorry if I upset you, mate, I didn't mean to. I'll stop asking about it, if you want me to.

Hope you're having a good summer anyway, we all wish you were here. You're right, if Dumbledore says you're safe there, you're safe there. Dad says Dumbledore might be the only one we can trust, soon enough.

Take care of yourself,

James.

* * *

Hi Moony,

Four marauders are definitely better than three. It's great having Sirius here and all, but it's like we always have to do whatever he wants.

I'm mostly just lucky that mum lets me see them at all, after Phil left home. I got a post card from

her the other day, she's in America, can you believe that? She said to say hello to you, so 'hello' from Phil.

Peter.

* * *

Moony,

Why did you have a go at James? He thinks you didn't mean to come off like that, but I know what you're like, you moody git. What's up?

Sirius O. Black

P.S. How come Philomena said 'hello' to you, and not to any of us? You're such a bloody ladies man.

* * *

Remus,

I know you got my last letter, the owl came back, and the Potter's owls are even more reliable than my family's.

Why aren't you replying?

Sirius O. Black

* * *

Remus? Please let us know you're ok?

James.

* * *

Moony?

* * *

Craig had been nicked at some point over the school year, and Remus returned to find that Craig's mate, Ste, was now in charge of the criminal element at St Edmund's. He was a good deal uglier and stupider than Craig.

"Bit tall for robbin' now, in't cha?" Ste squinted at Remus.

"Still skinny." Remus replied, holding his nerve.

"'ow'd you get all them scars?"

"Fighting."

Ste laughed meanly.

"Yeah, right. Weedy little toff like you."

"Fuck off," Remus took a step closer, "I ain't no toff." He was as tall as the sixteen-year-old –

maybe even a few inches taller. Yes, he was weedy, but he was holding his ground, and Ste was starting to look a lot less sure of himself.

“Alright.” The bigger boy said, tilting his head back, away from Remus. “Calm down mate. You’re in.”

Remus sneered at him, turned and walked away, satisfied.

Not much had given him satisfaction so far that summer. He felt more isolated than ever before – and angrier than he had been in a long time.

Remus almost hated Ferox for giving him the information he had on the last day of term – so that he could not make sense of it, or do anything about it. There was no one to tell; he was forbidden from mentioning Hogwarts to anyone at St Edmund’s, and he didn’t even know where to begin with the other marauders.

Their letters infuriated him, and he balled every one of them up in his fist then threw them away. He couldn’t bring himself to read, or watch TV, or even touch his homework. He felt as though he had boundless pent up energy, like an animal stalking the length of its cage. It built inside him, heating up until he was blazing with the desire to lash out and beat the shit out of the next person who crossed him.

Fortunately, most of the St Edmund’s boys seemed to sense this. Though Remus barely spoke a word to anyone, the other kids avoided him like the plague.

So, he sought out Ste.

Their first job was an easy one; he didn’t even need to be small for it. They stole a car, and all he had to do was climb in with the rest of them. They drove around for most of the night, smoking and drinking from a bottle of vodka they’d pinched from the off-licence some weeks prior.

Remus decided that he liked smoking. It made him look tougher, and kept his hands busy; he liked rolling cigarettes, and he liked the way they burned, inches from his lips. He liked breathing plumes of smoke and thought of Ferox chasing dragons in Romania.

The other boys warmed to him, after they got used to his quietness, and his general odd manner. He was still the youngest in the group, and they began to treat him like a little brother, plying him with fags and booze. Remus got properly drunk for the first time that summer, and they all laughed as he stumbled about in the park, and sympathised when he puked his guts out the next morning.

When they got drunk they liked to fight, too, which suited Remus. In the dark up on the common they threw themselves around, belting out Who songs, or The Jam, or even football chants if they were feeling particularly mindless. None of them seemed to care if Remus was too young or too skinny, and none of them treated him like he was an invalid because of his scars. Sometimes you just needed to get bashed about a bit, and at the end of the night they all staggered home friends.

The hot summer weeks passed in a chaotic blur – Remus spent most of his nights out with Ste and his gang, and his days sleeping off hangovers, trying to keep out of Matron’s way. He didn’t think about Hogwarts. He did very little thinking at all.

“Gotta get you some proper togs, Lupin,” Ste slurred, one night, “Can’t have you looking like a ponce all summer.”

Remus looked down at his standard issue St Edmund’s jeans and grey t-shirt. There was sick on his plimsoles. Had he done that? He couldn’t remember,

“Ain’t got the cash, ‘ave I?” He responded, searching for the cigarette he’d tucked behind his ear only a few minutes ago – or at least he thought he had.

“So?” Aggie, a short and chubby boy who reminded Remus of Peter shrugged, “My mate works in a warehouse down Southend, we’ll get you some proper gear.”

And they really did. For once, Remus looked like all the other boys his age – not in second hand clothes, but brand new. Bright blue drainpipe jeans, a button-down shirt (knock-off Ben Sherman, but as good as the real thing), white braces and black bovver boots. They shaved his hair right down, even shorter than Matron did it.

“You look the business.” Ste caught him under his arm, rubbing his head with rough knuckles.

When the moon came, and Madam Pomfrey saw him, she pursed her lips.

“I’ll say nothing about the outfit,” she said, primly, “But I don’t like the look of all these bruises – you must tell me if the other boys are hurting you.”

He just shook his head and waited for her to lock the door – he could already feel his blood boiling as the change began.

The next day, he was too weak to move. Madam Pomfrey insisted on staying the whole day to watch him, even arranging for a bed to be brought down to his little cell. Hangovers had nothing on transformations, Remus thought to himself. He’d have killed for a fag, though.

Bored, and too tired to be angry, he finally reached for a book. The three slips of newspaper fell out again and he quickly slammed the cover shut before Madam Pomfrey could see.

Greyback.

That was why he was so angry, he realised, in the first moment of clarity he’d had all summer. In fact, Greyback was pretty much the reason behind everything that had ever gone wrong in Remus’s life. Where could he be? How could you hunt a werewolf? There were plenty of books on that in the Hogwarts library, but Remus had always avoided them before, frightened of what they might say.

Well, tough. He’d have to stop being squeamish about stuff like that. He had to stop hiding from himself; stop letting everyone walk all over him, if he was ever going to... yes.

He was going to kill Greyback. To hunt him down, and then *put him down*, just like his father had wanted. Lyall Lupin would not have died in vain. A bolt of adrenalin shot through Remus as he thought about it. It was much better than rage.

It might take years before he was ready, he knew that. And he’d need money. As soon as Remus was fit, he approached Ste once more.

“Alright Lupin, me old pal?” The older boy smirked with yellow teeth through a haze of sweet, green smelling smoke. “Bloody hell, what happened to you?” He frowned at Remus’s fresh cuts.

“Never mind that.” Remus growled, no longer stressing his old accent, “Last summer Craig did over so many off-licences and pubs I had a trunk full of fag packets. This year I’ve got bugger all. You not as hard as Craig, or something?”

“Oi,” Ste sat up, hooking his thumbs behind his braces, “Watch it.”

“No, you watch it.” Remus snarled, showing teeth, “I’ve got two weeks left, and I need to stock up. Are you in, or not?”

Chapter End Notes

British slang dictionary:

Nicked – arrested/imprisoned (sometimes also means ‘stolen’/pinched)

Ste – common British (mainly northern) abbreviation for Steven/Stephen. Pronounced ‘stee’.

Togs/Gear - Clothes

Fourth Year: A Gathering Storm

Chapter Summary

CW for a bit of violence.

Sunday 1st September 1974

As Remus approached King's Cross station for the fourth time in his early life, he felt utterly invincible. He had grown taller still over the summer, and his face had changed too – no longer childish and round; his jaw was set and his eyes mean. In his heavy black boots (polished to a shine that morning) and his smart new clothes, Remus felt a stronger sense of identity than he had ever had. Ste had been very keen to give him a tattoo before he returned to school, but Remus had balked at that – he had enough marks already.

“They’ll all think you’ve joined a gang,” Matron tutted, barely concealing her disdain as she dropped him outside the station, “You look like a delinquent.”

“Piss off,” he muttered, “What do you care?”

She gave him a sharp clip around the ear, and he winced. She had to reach up to do that these days, but she still knew exactly where it hurt most.

“You’ll be at school before it gets dark, won’t you?” She said, business-like. He nodded, sullenly. It was a full moon that night. “Good.” She nodded. “See you next summer, then.”

He entered the station alone, and walked through the crowds with a practiced masculine gait – legs apart, hands balled into fists. People moved quickly out of his way as he approached, and a station guard eyed him suspiciously. Remus ignored them all and strode forward, purposefully, directly through the ticket barrier, bursting onto Platform 9 ¾ without so much as flinching.

He was late, and the platform was already almost empty, with only the last few tearful parents of first years lingering to wave goodbye. A cursory glance told Remus that the other three marauders were already on the train, so he climbed aboard and headed straight for their usual compartment, pushing roughly past the other students – many of whom seemed very small to him now – as he struggled with his battered old trunk.

They were in there; all three sitting squashed up on the same side of the compartment, huddled behind the morning edition of *The Daily Prophet*.

“Alright?” Remus said, as he entered.

James, who was sat in the middle, holding the paper, lowered it, and three pairs of eyes stared up at Remus. Peter looked white and nervous, which was pretty normal, and began to chew his bottom lip, glancing at James for an appropriate response.

James smiled, trying to be friendly, but his brown eyes wandered over Remus, from his steel toed boots to his closely shaved head. Sirius was hardest to read; his eyes widened slightly, but his expression remained neutral. Remus slung himself into the seat opposite as if he had not noticed.

“Good summer?”

“Not bad,” James said, cautiously, “The usual, you know... how was yours?”

“Yeah, good.” Remus withdrew a small tin case from his back pocket and opened it to reveal five pre-rolled cigarettes. He placed one between his lips and lit it with a match as the train began to pull away from the station.

Peter was now staring at Remus with his mouth slightly open, as if he didn’t recognise him. James looked concerned, a small crease formed between his eyebrows,

“We were worried when we didn’t hear from you.”

“Sorry. Busy.” Remus shrugged, exhaling smoke.

“Doing what?” Sirius asked, bluntly. James got up to open the window and let the smoke out, but he didn’t say anything about it.

“Just busy.” Remus said. *They* kept secrets from him, after all. He didn’t have to tell them everything.

“Are you ok, Remus?” James asked finally. “Has something happened?”

“Nope.”

“You seem different.”

“Your clothes!” Peter squeaked, suddenly.

“I’ve seen muggles dressed like it,” Sirius finally spoke up, “It’s *cool*, right, Remus?”

Remus shrugged again, feeling pleased, but hoping he looked outwardly nonchalant.

“My mates got ‘em for me, that’s all.” He said.

“Oh, well, if it’s a muggle thing...” James said, uncertainly. “You sure you’re ok?”

“Lay off, Potter,” Remus sighed, rolling his eyes. He didn’t want to talk about it anymore. Though he’d expected – even *wanted* – a reaction, he didn’t like the way they were all staring at him. Typical purebloods, they could prance around in hundred-year-old robes and stupid pointed hats and nobody said a word – but jeans and doc martens were apparently a step too far.

“What you reading, then?” He asked, nodding at the newspaper, hoping to distract them.

James looked gravely down at the broadsheet in his lap.

“The war.” He said, handing Remus the *Prophet*.

“War?!” That made him sit up straight. “What war?” He looked down at the headline, which read ‘*Jenkins criticised as security measures on ministry tightened*’.

“Didn’t you know?” James looked incredulous, “The wizarding world has been officially at war since 1970.”

Sirius and Peter nodded, solemnly.

“We weren’t even at Hogwarts in 1970,” Remus said, defensively, “I hardly knew *anything* about wizards then. What... I mean, who are we fighting?”

“That’s the problem,” James said, brusquely, “It’s too difficult to know, but this ‘Dark Lord’ person has been gathering a lot of allies – almost all purebloods.”

“I reckon those are the meetings my family are going to,” Sirius said, his voice low, even though they were alone. “James’s dad agrees with me.”

“Is that why the Slytherins were such a pleasure to be around last year?” Remus asked, connecting the dots now.

“Yep,” Sirius said. “And it’ll be worse this year, you can bet.”

“There were some... attacks, this summer,” James said, nervously. “On muggles, and a few mixed blood families.”

“They think the Dark Lord is using dangerous creatures,” Peter said, his voice trembling with fear, “Vampires and giants and... and...”

Remus shot him a look, and clenched his jaw,

“And werewolves?”

“Moony...” James started.

“I need the loo.” Remus stood up, quickly, exiting the compartment.

He stormed through the train, younger students leaping out of his way as he passed them, terrified. He didn’t need the loo, obviously, but he there wasn’t exactly anywhere else to go, so he locked himself inside a cubical at the far end of the carriage. It was much posher than the loos on muggle trains – with actual red velvet curtains in the windows and glimmering gold fixtures. The mirror even had a gilt frame. He stared at himself for a few minutes, glaring into his own eyes, clenching the sides of the sink until his knuckles turned white.

He’d thought he would be so tough after this summer – thought that nothing could touch him now. But everything was already unravelling, faster than he had expected, and he’d lost it at the very first mention of werewolves. How would he ever do what needed to be done if he couldn’t stay calm? Greyback would eat him for breakfast.

Unable to look at himself any longer, Remus sat on the toilet seat and considered punching the soap dispenser. That probably wouldn’t provide the satisfaction he needed, and he’d only end up covered in floral scented pink slime. He kicked the basin with his boot instead, leaving a long black rubber streak on the white porcelain.

“Fuck.” He muttered. That felt good. “FUCK.” He shouted, kicking the basin again.

“Who’s in there?” A sharp rap came at the door.

“Bugger off, it’s occupied.” He shouted back fiercely.

“This is a *Slytherin* carriage, you know.” The voice said coldly.

“Oh fuck *off* you stupid busybody.” Remus replied, slamming the door with his elbow.

If he had been in a more reasonable state, he might have calmly explained that the carriages were

not divided into houses, and actually, anyone could sit anywhere they wanted, even if it was on a closed toilet seat.

“I shall call for a prefect!”

“Oh my *god*,” Remus stood up, withdrawing his wand, “Are you *looking* for a fight or something?!” He flung the door open, finding himself face to face with a very shocked looking Severus Snape.

Severus might have frightened him when they were both eleven, but at fourteen Remus towered over Snape now, and with his wand raised and his face screwed up in annoyance, he must have been a terrifying sight.

“You.” They both hissed. Snape tossed his black greasy hair and sneered,

“What were you doing in there?”

“None of your business. Out of my way.”

“What are you wearing?” Snape pulled a face, looking him up and down with disgust. “Are those *muggle* clothes?”

“So what if they are?” Remus took a step forward, now so close to the Slytherin boy that he was practically breathing on him. “Got something to say? Not so big without your creepy mates around, are you, Snivellus?” He gave him a hard shove, knocking Snape to the floor.

Snape glared up at him, scrambling to his feet quickly and dusting off his shabby black robes. He narrowed his eyes,

“You’ll find out all about my ‘mates’ this year, *Loony Lupin*, I promise you that.” He said, very coldly.

“Not exactly in a position to be giving out threats though, are you?” Remus replied, almost conversationally. “I’ve heard *that* lot prefer purebloods... and Lily’s told me all about *you*, Snape...”

Snape’s eyes flashed, and a look of pure hatred crossed his face. He reached for his wand but – whether it was thanks to the closeness of the full moon, or just pure adrenaline – Remus was too quick for him. He grabbed Severus’s wrist and slammed it against the wall of the carriage, causing the Slytherin to cry out and drop his wand. Then, thinking of nothing but causing the most pain possible, Remus snapped his head forward and butted Severus, knocking him down a second time.

Snape was staring up at him, his black eyes shining with fear and rage, he clutched his robes against his nose, which was now gushing blood. Remus, feeling no better about any of it, spat on the floor and stepped over Snape.

“There’s your warning for the rest of the year,” he growled, “Stay out of my way.”

Snape said nothing, but didn’t try to get up. Remus walked away, confident the other boy wouldn’t try anything now. He stalked back the way he’d come, trying to get away from the rich, intoxicating smell of blood, and shut himself in the first empty compartment he came across.

There he sat, breathing deeply for a few minutes, trying to bring his heartbeat back under control, and to ignore the craving that was echoing somewhere deep inside him, where human reason could not touch it. Eventually, with shaking hands, he pulled out another cigarette, and smoked it

broodily, staring out of the window.

He was not alone for long.

“Moony?” The door slid open, and Sirius’s head poked around the door. Remus glared at him, but Sirius came in anyway, and sat opposite. “All right, what’s up?”

“Nothing.” Remus crossed his arms and slid down in his seat, staring at his boots. The laces didn’t match, red on the left, yellow on the right. He’d thought that looked really cool back in July, but now it looked a bit silly.

“Something’s up. You’re not yourself.”

“How would you know.” Remus spat in reply. “Maybe this is who I really am.”

“I just know,” Sirius replied, uncharacteristically calm. Apparently spending so much time at the Potter’s had done wonders for his patience. “It’s ok to be angry sometimes, Remus. It doesn’t mean anything, except that you’re normal.”

Remus looked up at him, surprised. Sirius smiled, understandingly, then smirked, “And for what it’s worth, I really do think you look *so* bloody cool.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Kind of dangerous.”

Remus snorted at the irony.

“Thanks.”

“So... bad summer, was it?”

Remus shrugged,

“It was ok. I was... I did a lot of stuff. I don’t want James to know about it.”

“Ok.” Sirius agreed, then cocked his head, brightly, “Can I try a cigarette?”

He pronounced the word as if it was new to him, with a slightly French accent, which was oddly endearing. Remus felt a surge of affection for his friend, which sent his heart pounding again. He fished a fag from his case and tossed it over with the matches. He watched Sirius carefully purse his lips around the white paper cylinder, strike a match and cup his hands close to his face. He didn’t cough, which was bloody impressive in itself, but only took a shallow breath before exhaling, and making a sour face.

“You get used to it.” Remus smirked.

“Ok.” Sirius tried again, inhaling more this time.

It was weirdly hypnotic, watching Sirius smoke. The haze of bluish grey made the carriage feel more intimate and private. Remus began to relax for the first time in months, as if something inside of him was unclenching, slowly. He looked at Sirius, and thought – *why not?*

“I found out some things, end of last term.” He said, quietly, looking at his boots again.

He reached into his shirt pocket and withdrew the three newspaper clippings Ferox had given him

last year. He handed them to Sirius, who reached through the smoke with long white fingers to receive them. “I don’t want to talk about it yet.” Remus said, quickly, “But read them if you like.”

“Ok,” Sirius nodded, gently, “Thank you, Remus.”

Fourth Year: Competition

Remus's bad start to the year did not improve when the train drew into the station. They arrived in Hogsmeade with only twenty minutes or so until sunset, and Remus found Madam Pomfrey waiting for him, looking anxious.

"Good luck, Moony," Sirius said under his breath as they parted ways amidst the throng of excited black-robed students. Remus nodded grimly, and Sirius gave his shoulder a nudge with his own; a show of adolescent solidarity.

Remus only had time to glance wistfully back as the three marauders climbed into one of the horseless carriages, one blond head, two dark – before Madam Pomfrey seized Remus by the elbow, and without warning apparated to the shrieking shack.

There was a blue and white plate sitting on the dusty mantelpiece with a thick chicken sandwich on top.

"In case you're peckish," the nurse explained, "You've still a bit of time."

He was starving hungry, but couldn't bring himself to eat it. Instead, he just sat down on his cot and waited to be locked in, wishing there was at least a bit of light in the dingy room. Remus thought about the feast – arguably his favourite part of the first night, other than sleeping in his big, comfortable bed. Neither would be happening tonight.

He could smell a rabbit outside, snuffing the grass, and his stomach gave a fierce growl. He looked at the sandwich again and considered it, but as pain shot through his shoulder blades he realised he had waited too long; the wolf was on its way.

* * *

Monday 2nd September 1974

One might assume that a hungry werewolf would quite fancy a chicken sandwich, but apparently only raw meat would do, and Remus awoke to find that the little meal remained intact, while his arms and legs were ripped to shreds. He sighed heavily, hauled himself to his feet, and went to sit on the bunk again. His hip had gone funny for the third time, and his limp was exaggerated as he staggered across the room. His left shoulder felt dislocated – thank god it wasn't his right, because he had a lot of homework to catch up on.

Closing his eyes, Remus slouched back against the wall to wait for Madam Pomfrey. It was dawn, and the marauders probably wouldn't be up for a few more hours, unless James decided he needed to squeeze some flying in before lessons. Remus knew that it was Harpreet Singh's final year at Hogwarts, which meant that the position of Quidditch Captain would be open next year, and James was not messing about.

"*Accio sandwich*," Remus rasped, finding his wand under the bed. The entire plate came flying towards him at such a speed that it hit the wall and shattered only inches away from his head. Groaning, Remus brushed away the shards of porcelain and began to pick hungrily at the stale bread.

Madam Pomfrey soon arrived and set to work patching him up before accompanying him back to the castle. He insisted on walking, rather than having her conjure a stretcher.

“I’m really not *that* bad,” he cajoled, “You’ve done a great job on my shoulder... I reckon I’m fine to go to lessons.”

“I don’t like the look of that limp,” she replied, “Hospital wing first, we’ll see how you are at lunchtime.”

“But it’s my first day...” he knew he was whinging, but he had to try.

“I’m sorry, Remus. Anyway, look at you, you’re dead on your feet. A few hours’ sleep and you’ll feel much better.”

Much to Madam Pomfrey’s dismay, James, Peter and Sirius were waiting outside the hospital doors for Remus – meaning that sleep would have to be put off a little bit longer.

“How’d James get you two up this early?” Remus grinned at them.

“It wasn’t easy,” James grinned back, Sirius stifling a yawn behind him. “I had to resort to threats of violence.”

“And actual violence,” Peter said, rubbing his arm, which looked very red.

“You ok, Moony?” Sirius asked, blinking a lot as if to look more alert.

“Fine, cheers,” Remus nodded, as Pomfrey ushered him into the room.

The marauders waited patiently while Remus undressed behind a screen and climbed into his usual bed at the far end of the ward.

“Five minutes!” Madam Pomfrey snapped, carrying over a sleeping draught, “He needs his rest, boys.”

“We can’t stay long anyway,” James said, “Lessons and everything. We brought you your new timetable, Moony.” He handed over the sheet.

Remus studied it carefully. Ferox’s lessons were at the end of the week, so at least he wasn’t missing those. But he had McGonagall and Runes, *and* History today,

“Could you—” he started,

“We’ll get your homework, Moony, don’t worry,” Sirius said, amused. “Nice to see you back to normal.”

“Yeah,” Remus raised an eyebrow, stretching out a bare arm to display his fresh claw marks, “Can’t get much more normal than me.”

* * *

He did feel much better once he’d slept the morning away. The anger which had torn him up for the past few months was still very present – but in some small way it had shifted, and he was able to think about other things. At Hogwarts, he felt better equipped to control his temper, he felt grounded and somewhat saner. As much as he didn’t like to admit it to himself, Remus was beginning to feel more at home in the wizarding world than the muggle one.

In addition, he felt surprisingly positive about having given Sirius the newspaper clippings. They had been burning a hole in his pocket all summer, and he was glad to be rid of them; to let someone else in on the secret.

Pomfrey allowed him to leave for dinner, and he tried to slip into the Great Hall without too much fuss. This plan was scuppered, however, as he was rugby tackled by three very excitable girls,

“Reeee-mus!” They all shrieked, capturing him in a tight hug.

“Hi!” He gasped, trying not to wince as Marlene squeezed his freshly mended ribs.

“We didn’t see you on the train!” Mary said,

“And you weren’t in Runes!” Lily added,

“Did you have a good summer?” Marlene asked, her voice slightly muffled under Mary’s arm.

“Yeah, great, thanks!” Remus straightened his clothes as they finally released him, standing back and grinning at him. “I wasn’t feeling well, but I’m ok now. How were your summers?”

“Great!” Mary pulled him towards the Gryffindor table, where the marauders were watching on with a mix of amusement and envy. He shrugged at them, helplessly, as he was manhandled into a seat. “Wait til you hear what me and Darren did—”

“*Not* at dinner!” Lily said, sounding exasperated, “Remus doesn’t want to hear what you got up to with your boyfriend!”

Remus’s eyes widened – her certainly did *not* want to hear – and he flashed a grateful look at Lily, who smiled back.

The girls all looked a little bit different. Remus was so tall now that he hardly noticed other people growing, but Mary, Marlene and Lily definitely had. They looked less like the kids he remembered from first year, and now reminded him of the girls that Ste and his gang whistled at when they were out in town. Mary, particularly, had developed noticeable curves at some point, and Remus couldn’t ignore the fact that half the boys on the Gryffindor table were staring at the way her white school shirt pulled across her chest.

“Oi, ladies,” Sirius called from further up the table, “Can we have Moony back, please?”

“No.” Mary replied, sticking out a pink tongue. She turned back to Remus, “I really like your hair! Avni said she saw you on the train and you were dressed like a skinhead – you haven’t actually joined a gang now, have you?”

Remus shrugged. Fortunately, the food appeared at that moment, providing a decent enough distraction. Unfortunately, girls were not like boys when it came to eating – while the marauders would have simply tucked in, heads down until they’d finished, Lily and Marlene picked at their food slowly, chatting about school and who was going out with who, and their new favourite actors.

“Marlene fancies a Slytherin,” Mary said, slyly.

“I do *not*.” Marlene turned bright red.

“You do so, I saw you watching him in Potions!”

“Are we doing Potions with Slytherin again, then?” Remus asked, his stomach sinking.

“Yep,” Lily said, brightly. “I think it’s better, don’t you? Slughorn always gives much more detail when his own house is in the classroom.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot,” Mary cocked an eyebrow, “Lily has had a crush on a Slytherin for *years*.”

“Severus is my friend.” Lily replied, witheringly. “You’re boy-mad, you.”

“I can’t help it if I’m more experienced than you lot,” Mary raised her chin in a very dignified, mature sort of way. Marlene covered her ears dramatically,

“If you’re going to start talking about Darren doing... *that* again, then I’m leaving!”

“Fine, fine,” Mary laughed, lightly. “I’ll shut up.”

She didn’t, though. She and Marlene ended up in a very intense debate over who was more attractive – David Essex or Donny Osmond. Remus took the opportunity to whisper to Lily,

“You’ve seen Sniv—Severus today, then?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Erm... did he say anything about... seeing me on the train?”

“No,” Lily sounded surprised, “Why? What happened?”

“Nothing!” Remus said quickly, “Just the usual, you know. Him being a prat.”

“Mm.” Lily replied, looking down at her food and playing with her fork. She seemed uncharacteristically nervous. “He can be a bit of a prat, I s’pose.” She looked up again, at Remus, and lowered her voice even further, so that he had to lean closer to hear her at all over the din of the dining hall,

“It was just a theory lesson today, Potions,” she whispered, “We didn’t have to partner up. So... if you wanted to work together again this year?”

“Oh, you don’t want to do it with Snape?”

Lily looked very pink indeed and shook her head,

“No, I think... well, you’re a lot less bossy, and we study together so much anyway, I just thought.”

“Yeah, sounds ok to me,” Remus shrugged, returning to his food. He really was starving hungry. That pleased him, too – James and Sirius always paired up, so did Marlene and Mary.

There was Peter, of course, but he had lots of friends in Slytherin, and tended to make mistakes when he was anxious, which annoyed Remus, who was a perfectionist. Lily was a nice, sensible sort of girl with a sense of humour, and she could always explain things to him so that they sounded easy. Plus, it would drive James bonkers.

The Snape incident still bothered him, slightly. He had half expected McGonagall to be waiting to pounce as soon as he was discharged from the hospital wing – Severus almost always went running to a teacher, if he could get away with it. And Remus had been absolutely, 100% in the wrong this time, he knew that much – Snape hadn’t so much as laid a hand on him, Remus had just humiliated him because he felt like it.

And Snape did not like being humiliated. Remus didn’t know much about the troubled Slytherin boy other than bits and pieces Lily had confided, but he *did* know that Severus Snape could hold a grudge like no one else. He would have his revenge, and if it wasn’t by getting Remus into trouble

with the teachers, then it was going to be something far more unpleasant.

* * *

“So, what were the girls talking about?” James asked, once they were all in their dorm room for the evening. He was trying to sound casual, but Remus saw through it.

“Oh, nothing interesting,” he replied, unpacking his trunk, “Boys, mostly, and snogging.”

“Snogging?!” Sirius sat up on his bed.

“Yeah, I know,” Remus scrunched his face up to show his distaste for the topic, “It’s all they’re interested in, these days. Mary and her muggle boyfriend did something over the summer.”

“What did they do??” Sirius looked very interested now – not disgusted at all, Remus realised.

“Er...” he faltered, “Well, I don’t really know. Lily wouldn’t let her talk about it while we were eating.”

“Ah,” James nodded, proudly, “Too clever for all that nonsense, Lily.”

“How’d you know it’s nonsense?” Sirius asked. “S’not like you do any snogging.”

“Oh, and *you* do?!” James frowned.

“Could if I wanted,” Sirius said, lying down again, arms behind his head, “Plenty of girls fancy me.”

“If you *wanted*,” James smirked, “So, what, you’ve got girls lining up for a cheeky snog and you’re just... not interested?”

An almost imperceptible look of panic crossed Sirius’s face, only for the most fleeting of moments, before it returned to its usual impish cheek.

“Jealous, are you, Potter?”

“Eugh, of you?!” James teased back,

“Bet *Lily* fancies me...” Sirius said.

“Take that back!” James roared, launching himself at his friend, wrestling him into a headlock.

Peter sighed, heavily and looked at Remus,

“They were like this all summer.” He said, glumly, “Everything’s a competition.”

* * *

Some hours later, Remus was just drifting off to sleep when his ears pricked, and he heard those familiar footsteps crossing the room. Shortly, his bed curtain twitched aside and Sirius whispered,

“Moony? You awake?”

“Yeah...”

Sirius crawled inside. Remus sat up, nervously. Sirius had only ever paid him a visit once before – usually he went to James if he wanted to talk about... well, Remus didn’t know what they talked

about, but he assumed Black family drama. The only time Sirius had sought out Remus was early in their second year, just after the marauders had discovered he was a werewolf. Remus thought back to that night, occasionally, and the memory was tucked away in a safe, calm part of his mind. He remembered lifting his shirt so that Sirius could inspect his scars – long dark hair brushing his skin.

“*Muffliato*,” Sirius whispered, casting the silencing spell.

“What’s up?” Remus asked, rubbing his eyes as Sirius lit his wand.

“The articles,” Sirius said, pulling the clippings from his pyjama pocket. “I read them.”

“Oh.” Remus felt a trickle of shame run down his spine. “Right.”

“I know you said you didn’t want to talk about it.” Sirius said, quickly, “But I just… well, I wanted you to know I’ve read them, I s’pose.”

“Ok, thanks.” Remus nodded.

“And… I understand why you’re angry.”

“Mm?”

“Anyone would be,” Sirius said, fervently, his eyes huge in the darkness, twin blue flames, “It’s… it’s… it’s just such a shitty hand to be dealt, Moony.”

Remus didn’t know what to say to that. He could hardly disagree.

“I won’t tell James, or Pete,” Sirius said, “Not unless you want me to.”

“No, please don’t.” Remus said, “I’m not… I’m not ashamed, it’s just… private, you know?”

Sirius nodded, pursing his lips.

“It’s safe with me.”

Remus, still feeling a bit shaky, gave a weak smile,

“God, you’re so dramatic.”

Sirius laughed too,

“James’s mum says I wear my heart on my sleeve.” He nudged Remus with his toe, “We can’t all be master secret-keepers like you, Moony.”

“I thought I wasn’t ‘me’ without secrets?”

“Yeah, but if you *have* to have them, I’d rather *I* knew.”

Remus snorted,

“Cos you’re so special, Black.”

“Cos if I don’t know, I’ll just try to figure it out anyway. Like you and your little cigarette selling enterprise.”

Remus’s mouth dropped open,

“You looked in my trunk! You wanker!”

“How dare you!” Sirius replied, haughtily, “I would never stoop so low. One of the sixth-year lads came ‘round asking for you. See if you were still selling this year.”

Remus groaned, slapping his forehead,

“Was it Dirk Creswell? Bloody moron.”

“How much did you make?”

“Enough. Please, don’t tell James, you know what he’s like about stealing...”

“You stole them?!”

“Bollocks.” Remus groaned again at his own stupidity.

“I don’t know how you do it, Moony,” Sirius said, awed, “But you surprise me every time.”

Fourth Year: September

Remus never did find out exactly what Mary had done, or had had done to her over the summer holidays. Whatever it was though, it had given her a certain amount of status amongst the other girls in their year group which was hard to ignore.

On Thursday, their first lesson of the new term with Professor Ferox, Remus arrived at the classroom to find a cluster of girls whispering near his desk. He elbowed his way through, grumpily, reclaiming his work space next to Mary. The girls tittered and resumed whispering. Mary, of course, was at the centre of the group, holding court and – by the looks of it – having a thoroughly marvellous time. Marlene, sitting by, was watching on with a look of envy and respect.

“And it didn’t hurt..?” A Ravenclaw girl asked, in a hushed tone,

“Nah, it’s fine if you relax,” Mary replied, with a bravado that reminded Remus of James.

“Do you think you’re going to... you know... with Darren..?” Another girl asked, her voice practically trembling with excitement,

“Well, I...” Mary started, but at that moment Professor Ferox emerged from his office, announcing his presence with a cheerful salutation,

“Welcome back, class! Seats, please!”

The girls all hurried into place, some looking very red faced and others unable to stop giggling. Remus frowned, trying to ignore them, and sat facing the front, back straight. Ferox gave him a friendly smile and nod, and Remus nodded back, smiling uncontrollably.

Ferox had clearly had a fantastic summer – his fair hair was a shade brighter, no doubt bleached by the sun. It was longer, and he now wore it twisted back in a long, knotted tail. His face was even more weather-beaten, and his nose rather red and peeling slightly from sunburn. He’d rolled up his sleeves, as usual, revealing sun browned arms and the odd burn mark.

“Good summer?” He asked the class, who all nodded and murmured in the affirmative. He grinned and clapped his hands together, “Excellent! I hope you all had a nice long rest, and you’re ready to begin work on XXXX rated creatures this term! First, let’s do a quick recap of last terms work, then see who’s done their summer reading...”

Remus himself had only just finished the reading that morning – and hadn’t even started on the extra texts Ferox had lent him. He sorely regretted wasting the whole summer being reckless now, and had already had to plead with professor McGonagall to let him have an extra week on his Transfiguration notes. He suspected that she had only relented after a conversation with Madam Pomfrey, which made him feel guiltier still, as he knew he was capable of beating most of the class even after his very worst transformations.

“You’re being too tough on yourself,” Sirius told him, as they were chased out of the common room the night before by prefects telling them to go to bed. “It’s the beginning of the year – if you’re going to fuck up, you may as well fuck up now.”

Remus had just glared at him,

“Easy for you to say! Some of us actually have to work for our grades! Plus it’s OWLs next year! I can’t drop my standards now!”

“Argh, please don’t mention OWLs,” James said, coming between them quickly in a less than subtle attempt to prevent an argument, “McGonagall and Flitwick have already put the fear in me. And *why* did we decide to do Divination?!”

“I quite like Divination,” Peter said, thoughtfully, dumping his pile of books, “Prophecies and that. It’s exciting.”

“It’s nonsense.” Sirius gave the smallest marauder a withering look. “You only like it because you’re good at Astronomy.”

“It’s not just that,” James said, slyly, changing into his pyjamas, “Noticed that Pete’s got a new partner this year?”

“Ohhh yes!” Sirius smirked, “The divine Desdemona Lewis, of Ravenclaw!”

Remus glanced up at Peter in surprised and watched him turn a shocking shade of scarlet from his blue pyjama collar to the roots of his yellow hair.

“Shut up.” He mumbled, climbing into bed, “She’s just a friend.”

“James,” Sirius said, in a very solemn voice, “What on earth are we going to do if Petey-boy here gets a proper snog before any of us?”

“Well, your reputation would be in tatters, for one thing.” James replied, in the same serious manner.

“What do I have, if not my reputation?” Sirius grinned back, getting into bed himself.

Remus huffed with disapproval, and pulled hard on his bedcurtains, returning to his book and hoping they all got the message. If they did, it didn’t matter.

“Of course, if *I* got a snog before you, that wouldn’t hurt.” James said, “*I’m* on the quidditch team.”

“You don’t have my animal magnetism.” Sirius replied.

There was a loud *fump* and an ‘oi!’, and Remus assumed that James’s pillow had crossed the room and made contact with Sirius’s head.

“I bet you—“ James started,

“Oh no...” Peter groaned, “Please don’t...”

“... I bet you TEN GALLEONS that I can get a girl to snog me within a month.”

“Ten?!” Peter gasped.

“Done!” Sirius called back. “Just you wait, Potter.”

Remus, who had lost all ability to concentrate on his book, huffed loudly again and decided to sleep. Pathetic. It wasn’t just the girls any more, now even the marauders were obsessed with snogging. It probably would be Sirius who won the bet – though James had a fair point about the quidditch team.

He felt sorry for Peter, who had gone very quiet. Remus tried not to think about the fact that none of his friends had made any comment on *his* likeliness to get a snog. He must rank even lower than

he thought.

Remus was troubled by this all week, right up to his Care of Magical Creatures lesson, which he now found himself daydreaming through.

As Ferox's lecture drew to a close, Remus realised he had made no notes at all. He looked down, panicked, and saw a neatly folded piece of parchment. Who had put that there? He glanced around, furtively, then opened it.

Please tell Sirius I think he's gorgeous. Effie Scunthorpe x

Heat flared up his neck as Remus screwed the note up into a ball and shoved it in his pocket. That settled it. Everyone had lost their minds.

* * *

As well as contending with the raging hormones which now seemed to infect every one of Remus's social circles, there was another noticeable change in the atmosphere at Hogwarts. Even if James had not explained to him that the wizarding world was at war, Remus thought he would have worked it out for himself this year.

The Slytherins – who had always considered themselves a cut above the other houses, and had therefore maintained a certain distance – had retreated even further into themselves now. They gathered in huddles in the classrooms, kept to their common room and moved through the corridors in ominous groups. Muggleborn students were also travelling in packs, Remus had noticed, and the teachers seemed to be making their presence known more than they had in previous years.

This did not stop certain incidents from taking place, however. Anyone who was not a pureblood quickly became adept at defensive spells, and even the marauders had swapped pranks for protection.

“Where are the bloody prefects when you need them?!” James complained, having just fired off a few well-placed *engorgio* charms at a group of sixth year Slytherins who were tormenting a first year Hufflepuff. The green robed teens were running away, now, clutching their various rapidly swelling extremities.

“I think even the prefects are scared,” Sirius replied, leaning against the wall, looking bored as James helped the Hufflepuff to his feet. “Cowards.”

“All they can do is hand out detentions and take house points,” Remus added, “And I don't think the Slytherins even care about those any more. I heard Mulciber last week saying that they should all put up with ‘trivial punishments for the promise of a greater reward.’”

“Mulciber said that?” Sirius arched an eyebrow, “Bloody hell, he's more eloquent than I gave him credit for.”

“Yeah, or he's parroting back something someone else has told him,” James countered, watching the Hufflepuff scurry away down towards the kitchens.

“What d'you think the reward is?” Pete asked, scuffing his toe on the flagstones.

“Money? Power? Life eternal?” Sirius sighed, rolling away from the wall and swaggering up the corridor. “Godric knows. They won't get it, though.”

“Why not?”

“Because, Petey-boy, we’re going to *win*.”

* * *

By the end of September, Snape had still not made his move. This put Remus somewhat on edge – and he wondered whether that was the intention. Their only shared lessons this year were Potions and Arithmancy. Arithmancy was fortunately a relatively quiet class, which mainly involved taking down notes and figuring out equations. Potions, being more practical, gave Snape (and the Slytherins as a whole) scope for much greater interference.

As they had agreed on the first day of term, Lily and Remus became partners, sharing a cauldron and dividing up notes and directions. This clearly infuriated Snape, who barely took his eyes off them the whole time. However, Remus had to admit that this appeared to have less to do with him than it did with Lily herself.

“Have you two fallen out or something?” Remus asked, one afternoon as Severus shoved his way past to leave the dungeons. Lily sighed, wearily,

“No, not exactly.” She said. “He got annoyed when I had Mary and Marlene to visit over the summer, that’s all. Thinks they’re not the right ‘sort’. I have to keep reminding him that *I’m* muggleborn too.”

“Why’d you put up with it?”

“I don’t, really,” She replied, sounding sad, “I always have a go at him when he spouts that pureblood nonsense, and sometimes I think he listens to me. But... well it’s not easy for him, you know.”

James was not making things easier; anyone could see that. He and Sirius had conveniently set up their own cauldron next to Remus and Lily’s, and ever since they’d made their bet James’s pursuance of Lily had dialled up a notch.

Now, James Potter was a true star on the quidditch pitch – that much could not be denied. He was elegant and graceful; he thought tactically and moved with simple subtlety.

When it came to Lily, he was none of these things.

“Give us a snog, Evans!” He tried, during their first lesson.

Lily was so appalled that she swished her wand fiercely through the air, upturning the contents of Potter’s cauldron. He and Sirius were stained bright blue for an entire week.

The following week, undaunted, James tried again. This time he had consulted his father, who had suggested that he try complimenting the object of his affections.

“I really like your hair,” he said, confidently, as soon as she approached the work bench.

“Mm.” She responded, not looking up.

“Yeah it’s so... um... ginger.”

Remus saw Lily’s jaw tighten. She *hated* being called ginger – she’d told him once that she’d been teased for her hair in primary school. Remus took a step back, seeing Lily reach for her wand as

she turned towards James with a false smile.

“Like it that much, do you?” She asked. Sirius, who had been watching Remus, took a step back as well. Poor James was too excited to finally have her attention, and nodded vigorously,

“Oh yeah, I think it’s—”

“*Rufusio!*” Lily whispered, pointing her wand at him.

Sirius guffawed so loudly that half of the class turned to look, and Remus had to cover his mouth to hide his own laughter. James’s confusion made it even funnier, until Marlene handed him her compact mirror so that he could see his newly bright red hair.

It took forty-eight hours to wear off, but it was no good. Even after two full days of being called ‘ginger nut’ and ‘carrot top’ (among some slightly ruder nicknames) wherever he went, James remained completely unshaken in his adoration.

“Just got to be patient,” he said, dreamily, running a hand through his messy auburn locks, “Nothing worth having isn’t worth waiting for.”

“It’s kind of impressive.” Sirius whispered loudly to the others, “I sort of don’t want to win the bet, ‘cos he’s made it too easy.”

“Yeah,” James snorted. “*That’s* why.”

“Oh, suck it, copper knob.”

Fourth Year: October

When Lily's kisses were not forthcoming, James demanded that they extend the bet to last the whole year. Sirius, in turn, said that in that case it ought to be worth double the galleons, which turned Peter white. Remus once again registered his disapproval of the whole thing, and demanded that they count him out.

He had much better things to spend his time on – and would not be spending any more money than he needed to. The others would have to be happy with a chocolate frog each for Christmas, because he simply couldn't spare the cash. Remus knew that he would need every last knut the moment he turned seventeen, in order to begin his mission to find Greyback.

His investigation had so far been fruitless. He had gathered up as many old editions of the *Daily Prophet* as possible, from the library and lying about the common room. Some of the more recent editions had articles which mentioned werewolf packs – but there was hardly any detail, and no names mentioned. In the end, Remus was forced to conclude that nobody really knew anything solid. He imagined werewolves were hard to find, especially if they were ordinary wizards most of the time.

Asking Ferox seemed like the next most sensible course of action. The Care of Magical Creatures teacher had suggested that he knew more than he'd initially revealed to Remus last term – only Remus hadn't had the presence of mind to ask, still reeling from the news that Ferox had worked for Lyall. He needed to work up the nerve before going back, however, and plan his questions carefully enough so that Ferox wouldn't suspect anything.

October began and ended with a full moon that year, which seemed very unfair, especially as it meant Remus would miss the Halloween feast. Still, the weather was unseasonably warm, and the marauders spent most of their free time enjoying the grounds under a fair blue sky, surrounded by the golden reds and browns of the most beautiful autumn Remus could remember.

On weekends he would settle down in the quidditch stands with several books, parchment and a quill, and complete his homework and advance reading, occasionally glancing up to watch one of James's drills, or cheer on poor Peter, who often got stuck as the stand-in keeper. Sometimes Marlene practiced with them, which made the afternoons even more pleasant as Lily and Mary would inevitably pop by.

Sirius was unable to sit still at all during these sessions. He alternated between trying to focus on his homework, to hopping on his broom for a race with James, to scribbling down complex tactical plays he thought the Gryffindor team ought to use in their first game, scheduled for November.

"We've got to thrash Slytherin this year." He kept muttering. "Got to show 'em."

Slytherin had won the quidditch cup the year before, and it was an immensely sore point with the Gryffindors – particularly Sirius, as both Narcissa and Regulus had been on the winning team. This year it was only Regulus, who had replaced his older cousin as seeker. Remus only knew this from James; Sirius had mentioned nothing.

"You need to lean into your broom more, when you take a swing," Sirius was telling Marlene, who had just sat down for a rest. She was red in the face, fair hair plastered to her damp temples, and not in the mood for Sirius's commentary.

"I hit the bludgers nine times out of ten." She replied, panting, "Ten times, in my best games. Even

Mulciber can't manage that."

"Don't try to be better than the competition," Sirius admonished, piously, "You've only got yourself to beat."

"Look, Black, if you think you can do better, we're trying out for beaters on Tuesday."

"Nah." He waved a hand, looking away. "You beat me, fair and square."

"Two *years* ago."

He didn't respond, and Marlene just shrugged, then staggered to her feet and headed back to the pitch, where James was calling for her.

Remus had been reading his book throughout this exchange, and hadn't wanted to interfere. He shot a glance at Sirius, who was leaning forward on the barrier, his chin resting on his arms as he watched the practice. Peter made a decent save, and Sirius's eyes lit up. Remus bit his lip, and thought hard, before saying quietly,

"There are *two* beaters on a quidditch team, you know."

"Bloody hell, Moony," Sirius replied sarcastically, not taking his eyes off the pitch, "Four years and you've finally learnt something about the game."

Remus ignored that, only tutting under his breath.

"You know your problem?"

"Do tell."

"You're proud."

Sirius laughed.

"And you're not?"

"Maybe. But I'd make a shit beater, wouldn't I?"

Sirius went quiet again. Remus sighed, heavily, closing his book, packing it into his bag, "Look, you're going to hate yourself later if you don't have another crack at it. You just going to sit here cheering James on for three more years?" He stood up, "I'm freezing, off to the library. See you at dinner?"

"Yeah, see you Moony."

That Tuesday, Remus went along to watch the Gryffindor team trials, and said nothing when he saw Sirius arrive, broom in hand. He didn't even smile smugly, though he dearly wanted to. Two hours later, Gryffindor had their new beater, and Remus realised that he now had to share his dorm with two James's.

-- Except for one very important difference -- while Sirius was undoubtedly full of passion for the sport, he appeared to lack James's discipline. Particularly in the mornings.

"Wakey wakey!" James chanted, brightly, as he exited the bathroom, hair shining and wet -- the only time it ever lay flat on his head. He pushed on his glasses and flicked his wand at Sirius's bed, drawing back the curtains.

It was a week after trials, and this scene was becoming commonplace. Remus was already awake, almost dressed for breakfast, planning to get in an hour's reading before lessons started. He was tying up his shoelaces as he watched James and Sirius begin their new morning routine.

Sirius, who was little more than a shapeless lump under the duvet, groaned like a disgruntled troll.

"Piss off, Potter," he hissed, burying his head under his pillow.

"You wanted to be on the team, Sirius me ol' chum. C'mon, up you get... *Leviocorpus!*"

With that, Sirius's body flew into the air, seemingly yanked by some invisible force, leaving him hanging upside down in mid-air while James laughed hysterically.

"I can't believe that worked! Been trying to do that since last Christmas."

"Let me down you wanker!"

"Be nice!"

"Let me down!"

"*Finite.*"

Sirius landed on the floor with a thud, and leapt up immediately, rubbing the arm he'd landed on.

"Bloody hell!" He grinned at James, "That was amazing! Now let me do it to you."

"Ok!"

* * *

Bodily levitation did not become a regular fixture of the fourth year boys' dorm, but trying to drag Sirius out of bed did.

"Just one day off a week, Potter, I'm begging you!" He groaned at the breakfast table, one early Sunday morning. He barely opened his eyes, his lolling head propped up on his elbow.

"*You're* the one who wants to destroy Slytherin." James replied, cheerily, buttering some toast and sliding it over to his friend. Sirius glanced down at the offering disdainfully and looked away, closing his eyes again. James sighed, "Not just you, either. The whole school wants to see them beaten. Think of it as doing your bit for the war effort."

"I thought you were doing your bit by hexing them in the corridors." Remus said, helping himself to a slice of Sirius's toast.

"Exactly." Sirius grunted, eyes still closed. "And that can be done at a reasonable hour."

"This is the only time we can fit practices in," James said, starting to sound a bit annoyed now, "There's no point going after dark, the pitch gets booked up in the evenings and lessons start at nine."

"Even if they started at twelve you'd have trouble getting Sirius up." Peter said, mouth full of porridge.

"We should get time turners." Sirius yawned, without a trace of humour, "Students who need their beauty sleep should be issued with them."

“What’s a time turner?” Remus asked, taking Sirius’s second slice of toast.

“Turns back time, obviously,” Sirius said, scathingly.

“They’re illegal.” James said, quickly, “Without ministry permission. And really, really dangerous.”

“*I’m* dangerous if I don’t get enough sleep,” Sirius grumbled.

“Matron used to make us all get up at six on weekends,” Remus said, thoughtfully, swallowing the last of his toast. “She thought it was healthy, or something. One of the older boys got into her room once and fiddled with her alarm clock, though, and we got away with an extra two hours in bed every day for a week before she noticed.”

“Muggles are ingenious.” James chuckled. “But stay away from my alarm clock.”

“Mmm.” Remus murmured, deep in thought. He could feel the beginnings of an idea coming on.

“Oh no, we’ve lost him.” Sirius said, watching Remus. “Probably daydreaming about nogtails and nifflers again – I swear Care of Magical Creatures is the only subject he cares about any more.”

“Leave Moony alone and eat your breakfast.” James castigated. “I want you on the pitch in five minutes.”

“Fine...” Sirius sighed heavily, and looked down at his plate, “Oi! Where’s my breakfast??”

“Got to go,” Remus said, suddenly standing up, “Library. See you in Potions.”

Early mornings were Remus’s favourite times in the library – everything was so neat and tidy, and he usually had the place to himself. Very few students were in the mood to study first thing, but Remus had found that during certain phases of the moon he barely slept five hours a night anyway, and so he was a regular visitor.

The idea took a while to form properly, but he wanted it to be clear and complete before bringing it before the other marauders. Then at least it would be fully *his* prank. Remus felt the need to make his mark on something this year. Everyone else seemed to be focussed on other things – the war, or quidditch, or ‘the great snogging race’, as Sirius had so eloquently dubbed it. They hadn’t even tried to sneak to Honeyduke’s once. Remus felt very strongly that the marauders needed a prank – and a big one.

He wasted half an hour researching complex and convoluted time spells; incantations to stop time, speed it up, slow it down, or even bend it. (He wasn’t really sure how bending time worked, but it didn’t sound pleasant, or within his scope of ability). Eventually, he came to the conclusion that he was overthinking it, as usual. This was not a magical problem – it was mechanical.

By the time the school day was about to begin, Remus had located the passage he needed in *Hogwarts: A History*, and was satisfied that he’d have a plan by the end of the week. He left for Potions in a pretty good mood – one which was quickly shattered when he realised he was being followed.

The feeling of being watched had been pricking the back of his neck while he’d been in the library, but as it was generally a quiet and solitary place anyway, he’d put it down to an overactive imagination. And there was always the chance that Madam Pince was lurking behind him, standing guard over her precious books. By 8.45 the hallways were crowded with students hurrying to their lessons, chattering and giggling, hurriedly eating breakfasts on the go, or scribbling down last

minute homework. Although this year Remus's policy had been never to travel alone, he was satisfied that it was busy enough and there were enough Gryffindors around to be safe.

However, as he began to descend the first set of stairs leading to the dungeon, the prickling feeling returned once more. As a rule, Remus tried to ignore instincts like that – they belonged to the wolf, and he resented the intrusion. But he couldn't shake it, and reached for his wand, gripping it tight.

Finally, only a corridor away from the Potions classroom, he made a deliberate wrong turn and darted behind a tapestry. He waited. Sure enough, only a few seconds later, Severus Snape peered around the corner, looking confused. Irritation boiled up in Remus's throat, and before he could think about it reasonably, he pointed his wand at the Slytherin and chanted,

"Petrificus Totalus!"

Snape went rigid, a look of surprise on his face that would have been comical, if Remus wasn't so angry. The black-haired boy fell to the ground, arms and legs straight as a board, completely paralysed. His beady black eyes stared around, frantically, as Remus stepped out from his hiding place. He gave him a kick – not *too* hard, and only in the shin – and smirked down at Severus.

"Stop following me, you creep." He said. "Didn't I warn you?"

Snape stared helplessly up at him, and Remus laughed before heading for Potions with a spring in his step.

Fourth Year: November (Part 1)

“Don’t forget, I need that three-page essay on the similarities and differences between Thunderbirds and Phoenixes on Friday at the latest.” Professor Ferox called out. “No excuses.”

Mary and Marlene groaned as they packed away their things.

“I completely forgot about that,” Marlene whispered, “And I’ve got practice almost every night this week – we’ve got the Ravenclaw match on Sunday.”

“I’ll lend you my notes.” Remus replied, carefully blotting his paper. “It’s really easy.”

“Sunday’s Sirius’s birthday too, isn’t it?” Mary asked, thoughtfully.

“Yeah, how did you know?”

“Well we *did* sort of go out last year.” Mary said, haughtily, tutting at Remus. “And you lot always make such a massive fuss over birthdays it’s pretty hard to forget. God, I hope Gryffindor win, or he’ll be in a right mood.”

“Yeah.” Remus agreed. He hadn’t thought of that. He’d planned to reveal his big prank plan on Sirius’s birthday, in lieu of a proper gift. Now he wondered if he ought to buy something as well – though they weren’t due in Hogsmeade for a few more weeks. He could always give Sirius a pack of cigarettes, but that seemed a bit cheap, especially as Sirius knew they were stolen.

Andromeda had already sent some presents ahead, care of the Potters, and James had them hidden under his bed. More records, of course – Remus dearly hoped that one of them was the new Bowie LP, *Diamond Dogs* .

“I’m off to the Owlery, need to send something to Darren,” Mary said, as they left the classroom. “Coming, Marls?”

Marlene looked a bit put out, so Remus said quickly,

“I’m going to the library, if you want to get those notes?”

“Yeah, thanks Remus!”

They said goodbye to Mary and began walking in the opposite direction together. Remus liked Marlene a lot – she was tall for a girl, and he didn’t have to crane his neck to talk to her all the time. Other than her emotional outburst at the end of their third year, she was also very much a no-nonsense person, which Remus found very calming compared to Mary, who was always a lot of fun, but sometimes very full on.

“Thanks,” Marlene grinned at him, “I love the girl, but there’s only so many times I can proofread her dirty letters to Darren.”

“*Dirty* letters?!” Remus gaped. Marlene laughed,

“Yeah, it’s pretty horrendous. Hey, Remus, can I ask you something?”

“What?”

“Um... does Sirius like me?”

Remus fought his initial reaction, which was one of despair. It felt as though he hadn't got through a week of the new year yet without having to listen to someone's romantic problems. Why did they all think *he* was the best person to talk to? When had he ever given the impression that he was even remotely interested?

"I dunno." He said, hoping he didn't sound too annoyed. "You'd have to ask him."

"I don't think he'd give me a straight answer," Marlene chuckled. "Sorry, it's just that he's been acting really weird around me during quidditch practice."

"Weird?"

"Yeah, just comments and stuff. It's a bit annoying, really, I don't really fancy him as much as I used to – you know, he's such an attention seeker, he was always much more Mary's type."

"What comments?"

"Stuff about me giving him a kiss for luck, or something... Maybe it's his idea of flirting, or maybe it's a joke – you never know with James and Sirius, do you?"

It suddenly dawned on Remus what was going on, and he was half angry, half embarrassed for Sirius.

"What?" Marlene said, stopping just outside the library, "What's that face for?"

"Ugh, Marlene, look, I'm really sorry about this, but..." and he explained to her all about the bet.

Ok, yes, she was quite likely to tell Mary, and Mary was extremely likely to tell everyone else in their year – but that would serve the boys right, in Remus's opinion. He took a distinct pleasure in ruining Sirius's chances at winning the stupid bet. Fortunately, Marlene was a very sensible girl, and by the end of Remus's explanation she was giggling.

"It makes so much sense!" She said, wheezing, "James kept trying to stop Sirius talking to me and everything. Those boys! They're completely ridiculous."

"Yeah." Remus grinned, relieved that someone else shared this opinion.

"Oh great, now I can have some fun with it," Marlene smirked, as they entered the library, lowering their voices. She then added, a little wistfully, "Shame James hasn't tried it on. He might have a chance."

Remus raised his eyebrows.

"Well, he's only got eyes for Lily, so."

Marlene sighed,

"That's a losing battle. Still, never mind."

They settled down at their favourite desk, which was near to the biggest window and provided some nice natural light. Remus pulled out his notes and showed Marlene how he'd listed all of the qualities of thunderbirds, then phoenixes, then how he'd begun to compare the two. Grateful for his help, Marlene offered up her Astronomy notes, and the two of them spent a companionable hour scribbling away. Eventually it was time for dinner.

"Remus," Marlene said, quietly, as they finished up, "Are all of the marauders in on this bet, or just

James and Sirius?”

“Er... I think Peter’s doing it. He might regret it a bit now, though.”

“So you’re not?”

“No!” He replied, a little bit more loudly than he meant to.

“Shame,” she replied, her eyes twinkling, “Because I bet you could win.”

He snorted,

“As if.”

“Girls like you! You’re really nice, and kind, and clever.”

“Shut up.”

“I’d snog you.”

“Oh my god, Marlene...” Remus started walking a bit faster, his ears feeling very hot, “You’re my friend!”

“Yeah, but just to win the bet.” She grinned, matching his pace. He forgot how athletic she was, and he still had a dodgy hip. “Isn’t there anyone you fancy?”

“No. C’mon, I’m hungry.”

It wasn’t a lie, Remus thought to himself. It sort of felt like one, though.

* * *

“GO GO GRYFFINDOR GO GO!” Remus chanted along with everyone else. Having Peter wildly waving his scarf over his head like a lunatic with a knitted lasso helped mitigate any embarrassment Remus might have felt for himself.

He was nervous, though; more nervous than he had been for James and Marlene’s first game; because Sirius - while of course very good at flying - did not always make the best decisions under pressure. And quidditch was a dangerous sport, if you were reckless.

Half of the crowd was decked out in blue, the other half in scarlet, and a deafening cacophony of boos and cheers erupted as the two teams walked onto the pitch. James was visible as ever with his wild mess of hair, and from a distance the two Gryffindor beaters were the same height, distinguishable only by their different coloured ponytails poking out under their helmets - one flaxen, one black.

Remus felt his heart in his mouth as the players mounted their brooms, squatted slightly, then launched into the air at the blow of the whistle. It was hard to know who to follow, as James zipped up and down the pitch like a lightning bolt in pursuit of the quaffle, while Marlene and Sirius split off, covering different ends of the pitch, bats aloft.

The two beaters had very different styles - Marlene was focussed, and tended to tail the players rather than the bludgers in order to better protect her teammates. Sirius favoured a different tact - going directly after the offending balls no matter where they were, and knocking them as far away from the game as possible.

“This is Black’s first game and he’s obviously throwing himself into it,” The commentator’s voice echoed over the crowds, “He’s no doubt received plenty of coaching from Potter - who’s just scored the first goal! That’s Gryffindor in the lead with ten points!”

Remus was too anxious to cheer along with everyone else, getting dizzy trying to follow all three of his friends in the air.

“As I was saying,” the commentator, a seventh year Hufflepuff, continued, “Lots of talent on the Gryffindor side this year - Potter, of course, and McKinnon, who’s one of the best beaters the reds have had in years, and now Sirius Black, the black sheep of a bonafide quidditch dynasty - you’ll remember his cousin, Narcissa Black of Slytherin, one of the finest seekers Hogwarts has ever seen, and of course the younger Black brother, Regulus, who has taken Narcissa’s place after a season as chaser. Rumour has it that there’s bad blood in the Black clan, so you can bet that the Gryffindor/Slytherin match next term is going to be--”

“If you will please focus on the game currently in progress, Miss Darcy!” McGonagall snapped over the megaphone.

“Sorry, professor! So that’s Dunelm of Ravenclaw in possession of the quaffle, she shoots, she--- oooh, and it’s a bad miss...”

The game went on, and Remus hoped that Sirius hadn’t been listening to the commentary - bringing up the Black family was a surefire way to break his concentration. But no, all seemed well - he was hitting the bludgers with a bit more vigour, but that could just have easily been adrenaline.

By the end of the game, it became evident that Remus’s concerns were for nothing. Sirius may not act as though he took quidditch seriously off the pitch, but clearly having a cheering audience did wonders for his concentration.

Once the Gryffindor seeker caught the snitch - ending the match on 300 - 110 in Gryffindor’s favour, the two beaters flew to the ground. Remus saw Sirius throw a gallant arm around Marlene’s shoulders, and lean in - only to be dodged deftly as she offered her cheek for him to kiss.

* * *

The common room was a riot of red, gold and rock music that evening. The whole house came out to celebrate both Gryffindor’s victory and Sirius’s birthday. Remus, for what it was worth, sold more cigarettes than he had all year so far - he had come prepared, assuming correctly that the older students would be drinking, making them more inclined to pay up for a hit of nicotine. He himself stayed away from any suspicious looking drinks, remembering his hellish hangovers from the summer.

Sirius and James were in their element, of course, roaring with laughter and soaking up the congratulations from their classmates. Peter hung about close enough to enjoy the limelight, but not so close as to get in the way.

Remus was happy to watch at a distance, chatting with Lily and Mary and enjoying the snacks brought up from the kitchens. He knew he would not get a chance to divulge his plan until much later, now, but that was ok. Better for everyone to enjoy themselves, there was plenty of time yet.

At some point, Sirius finally got around to opening his presents - a broom repair kit from James, a lot of chocolate from Peter, and from Andromeda no less than three brand new albums; *Dark Side of the Moon*, *Country Life* (which had an incredibly rude cover that all of the boys smirked passed

around, and made Remus want to die of embarrassment), and *Diamond Dogs* .

“Oh!” Remus said, unable to contain his excitement as he held the much awaited record in his hands, stroking the bizarre, nightmarish artwork. “Put this one on first? Please?”

Sirius grinned,

“Anything for you, Moony!” And settled the disk into place on the turntable.

Owww oooooooooohhhh...

The record player howled, sending a shiver of shock down Remus’s spine - the cry of a wolf. He stared up at James and Sirius in alarm. They looked just as surprised as he, though Sirius broke into a smile as David Bowie’s voice filled the room, as if speaking an incantation:

And in the death...

As the last few corpses lay rotting on the slimy thoroughfare,

The shutters lifted in inches in Temperance Building,

High on Poacher's Hill,

And red, mutant eyes gaze down on Hunger City...

The whole common room was uncomfortably quiet as this grim, ugly poem was recited, not quite sure where to look as dogs howled and whined in the background. It made Remus feel dark and dirty - but he thought he liked it; as if Bowie was speaking directly to him. Especially as the final lines were yelled out:

"This ain't Rock'n'Roll!

This is genocide!"

* * *

“A whole month?!” Sirius whispered loudly.

“Thirty days, yep.” James replied, in the same stage whisper, “If we do it over the summer...”

“You forgot the silencing spell, idiots.” Remus called out.

“Bugger.” Lots of rustling.

It was well past midnight on the day of Sirius’s birthday, and the party had long since been broken up by the prefects. The marauders had climbed the stairs to bed sleepy and excitable, but apparently James and Sirius had had a second wind and were now in private conference in James’s bed. Remus had a pretty good idea what they were talking about, but had decided to leave them be for now. See how far they took it. Still, he knew they’d realise they’d forgotten the spell eventually, and decided honesty was the best policy.

Remus and Sirius poked their heads out from behind their respective curtains at the same time.

“Sorry, Moony.” Sirius grinned, “Did we wake you?”

“Nah,” Remus shrugged, “I was... actually, I was thinking about this prank...”

“Prank?!” James’s head joined Sirius’s in the gap between the curtains, “Who said prank?!”

Remus smiled, shyly. He’d thought he might have to wait until next weekend to tell them, but James magnanimously opened the bed curtains further, “Please, Mr Moony,” he said, “Step into our office...”

Eagerly, Remus scrambled out from his tangle of bedsheets and padded barefoot across the chilly bedroom floor into James’s bed. He felt as though he’d been waiting four years for an invite.

“Well?” James asked, seriously, pointing his wand light at Remus like a microphone. “Tell us!”

“Just a second,” Remus rolled his eyes, withdrawing his own wand, “*Muffliato!*”

“He’s too clever for us.” Sirius said, dryly.

“Indeed.” James agreed.

Remus ignored them; they were jumpy and silly from lack of sleep, he had to at least give them the gist of his plan before they finally crashed.

“Remember how I was telling you about Matron’s alarm clock?” He asked them, quickly. The boys nodded obediently like cocker spaniels. “And how we used to fiddle with it so we didn’t have to get up early anymore?” More nodding, “Well, I was thinking about how it could be applied to Hogwarts. I did some research, and - did you know that all of the clocks at this school are controlled by one master clock? The big one outside the Great Hall.”

“Oh MOONY!” Sirius cried, suddenly throwing himself at Remus, flinging his arms around him with such force that they both toppled backwards on the bed. Startled, Remus tried to push him away, but Sirius held fast, pretending to sob onto his shoulder with joy, “You’ve READ *Hogwarts: A History* ! One of you has *finally* read it! You’re now my favourite marauder!”

“Gerroff, tosser!” Remus growled, finally forcing him off and shuffling further away on the bed, James laughing at them both.

“No one would ever guess you’re the oldest, Black,” James grinned. “Moony, please continue. The big clock...?”

“Right, yeah,” Remus straightened his night shirt, feeling very hot and flushed from the assault, “Err... so... um... I had this idea... I...” It was no good, he’d completely lost his train of thought, now all he could think about was what an irritating idiot Sirius was.

“The big clock controls all the others,” Sirius filled in, quickly, remarkably lucid now, “It’s a spell that makes sure every clock and watch in the castle is perfectly synchronised. Even the ones we bring from home re-set - even *muggle* clocks. It’s a bloody good bit of magic.”

“Yeah,” Remus nodded, getting back into the flow, “Yeah, exactly. So I’m thinking; if that clock goes wrong, or gets moved by five minutes - then so do all the others. And it would affect lesson times, and meals, and... well, pretty much the whole running of the castle. And if we started off *really* slowly - say, moving it forward five minutes a night - no one would notice for ages, would they? I mean, how *could* anyone notice, if all the clocks are the same?”

He finished, sitting back and looking at James, because he was still annoyed with Sirius for flustering him and almost spoiling it. James’s brain was working at warp speed - Remus knew this because he had pushed his glasses back on his nose. Finally, he looked at Sirius and smiled.

“Our Moony’s done it again!”

Fourth Year: November (Part 2)

Monday 4th November 1974

"I dunno." Peter said, wringing his hands again. "Professor McGonagall says we shouldn't mess about with time."

"We won't be," Sirius groaned, having already explained the plan twice. "This is a muggle prank, Peter, get it through your thick skull!"

"Don't." Remus frowned, feeling sorry for Peter, who had been sulking all day anyway because he'd been left out of their night time planning. "We're not messing about with time, Pete," Remus explained kindly, "We're just messing about with clocks."

Peter looked at Remus, then at James for confirmation.

"Ok." He said, slowly. "I think I get it."

They'd agreed to do it as soon as possible, and struggled to get through their lessons that day with the mounting anticipation for their devious scheme. Remus had to shush James and Sirius more than once when their excitement got the better of them - they were hardly subtle at the best of times.

"It won't work if anyone else knows about it." Remus hissed at lunch when Mary asked what they were whispering about. "So shut up! *I know* you lot can keep a secret if you really try."

They could hardly wait for night to fall and the castle to grow still and quiet. It had been a long time since they'd all been out of bounds together after dark, and even though it was a very simple task, all them wanted to go.

There was one problem. It was much more difficult to get all four of them under the cloak than it had been three years ago.

"Peter, you stay here." Sirius said, after their third attempt.

"Why me?" Peter protested, "Why am I always the one left out?!"

"We're not leaving you out, idiot, this is purely a logistical concern." Sirius rolled his eyes.

"James!"

"I'll stay," Remus offered. "I'm the tallest, it's my fault."

"But it was your idea," Sirius whined, "You can't miss out!"

Remus shrugged,

"There'll be lots of times. We're doing this more than once."

"Even with three it's a squeeze." James said. "Black, Pettigrew, sit this one out."

"Why me?!" Sirius and Peter both cried at the same time.

"Because." James's said, lips curling, "It's Moony's idea and *my* cloak."

It took a little more squabbling, ego massaging and many promises that every night they would take it in turns, just to be fair, before the two rejected marauders conceded. Soon afterwards, Remus and James were creeping through Gryffindor common room under the cloak, tiptoeing past a few sleeping seventh years lying unconscious on their NEWT textbooks.

“Hopefully they’ll stop squabbling if we give them an hour alone.” James whispered, as they left the portrait hole and entered the dark empty corridor.

“Why is Sirius being such a dickhead to Peter, anyway?” Remus asked his own voice as low as possible. They didn’t want to disturb Peeves - or even worse, Mrs Norris.

“All the girls know about the Great Snogging Race,” James replied, moving slowly so that Remus could keep pace, “Sirius thinks Pete told them.”

“Why would he think that?”

“You know Black,” James said with a smile in his voice, “Loves jumping to conclusions. Usually the wrong ones.”

“You don’t think it was Peter, then?” Remus asked, innocently,

“Moony.” James snorted, “I know it was you.”

“Ah.”

“Doesn’t bother me,” James laughed, quietly, “If anything it’s improved my chances of winning the bet.”

“Marlene offered to snog me,” Remus said, suddenly, “But I told her I wasn’t in the bet.”

He wasn’t sure why he’d chosen to tell James - or why he’d picked such an inopportune moment to do so. He supposed he just wanted somebody to know. Maybe it was a boasting thing - they were the ones who hadn’t included him in the running in the first place.

“Ha,” James said, “Don’t tell Sirius, he’ll never get over it.”

“She’d snog you.” Remus added, charitably, “She told me she would.”

“Alas, it’s not to be,” James replied, casually. Remus was thoughtful for a little while, but they’d reached the clock now, at the bottom of the grand staircase.

It was very big and very beautiful, with a vast mahogany frame carved with various magical creatures and plants, the face and hands cast in shimmering gold.

Remus pulled out his wand and concentrated carefully on unbinding the protective charms placed there by a great wizard long ago. It took a long time; they were complex and intricate, braided together fine as lace. But slowly and surely, one by one, he felt the magic unfasten with a gentle pop somewhere in his midsection. He smiled at James.

“There we go.”

James waved his own wand at the clock, and the longer hand rolled backwards five minutes. He looked down at his own watch, and they both saw it synchronise. James chuckled under his breath.

“See Moony, I knew it had to be you. C’mon, better get back.”

They crept back up the stairs, quicker now, giddy with triumph. At the top, Remus had to pause for breath for a moment. He rested a hand on James's shoulder to steady himself, and the other boy waited patiently.

"Hey, James?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you really going to lose the bet to Sirius for Lily's sake?"

James's back stiffened slightly, but he didn't sound annoyed.

"Might not lose."

"But Lily's never going to--"

"I'm the one taking Divination, Lupin, not you."

"Yeah, but she hates you."

"She doesn't hate me." James chuckled. "Lily Evans doesn't have a hateful bone in her body."

Remus said nothing to this, knowing it was quite true. James continued, "It's just not time yet, that's all. But I don't mind."

"Oh." Remus said. It struck him for the first time that James didn't simply *fancy* Lily. It was something else altogether. Remus wanted to ask more questions, but he didn't know how - he wasn't Sirius, he couldn't be that brazen.

When they got back to the bedroom, Sirius was pacing the floor, and the curtains were drawn around Peter's bed. It could be assumed that they had not used the time to settle their differences.

"Well?" Sirius barked, eagerly, as James and Remus threw off the clock.

"Done." James said, simply, yawning and heading for his own bed. He patted Sirius on the shoulder as he passed him, "Enjoy your five minute lie in."

* * *

And so the prank went on. Every night that week, two marauders would creep downstairs under the invisibility cloak and perform the spell to move that minute hand back by five degrees, so that by Saturday morning, every clock at Hogwarts was running twenty-five minutes late. So far, no one seemed to have noticed, and James and Sirius were getting restless.

"The thing is," Sirius yawned over breakfast, sleepy eyed in his rumpled quidditch kit. "We're not actually getting an extra half-hour's sleep, are we? We're not going to *bed* any earlier."

"No, well that wasn't actually the intention..." Remus said, attempting to construct a marmalade and strawberry jam toast sandwich.

"Still, I think we ought to be getting something out of it."

"The satisfaction of a job well done?" Remus responded, dryly, before biting into his creation. Sweet fruit jelly oozed from between the crusts, getting all over his fingers. Sirius grimaced - he had an aversion to sticky things.

The brilliance of their own genius was apparently not enough for Sirius, however. The next morning Remus woke up long before his alarm rang, and when he checked his bedside clock he saw that it was apparently still 7am. He went over and shook Sirius.

“What did you do last night?” Remus asked, once Sirius finally woke up, “You and James did the clock, didn’t you?”

“Fancied a bit more of a lie in, that’s all…”

“How much did you move it by?”

“I dunno, hour or two?”

“What?!”

“What??” Sirius looked genuinely surprised. “Isn’t that the whole point of the prank?”

“Well…” Remus sighed. What was the point? It couldn’t go on forever, anyway. “That’s still too much. I’m going to go and see if I can turn it forward a little bit tonight.”

Sirius shrugged, rolled over and went back to sleep.

A few people commented on how odd it was to wake up in broad daylight in the winter at seven o’clock in the morning, but as it was a Sunday anyway Remus thought they’d got away with it. That evening, Remus and Peter crept downstairs as usual, and Remus tried to correct Sirius’s recklessness.

“Can we make it so that we get up earlier next Saturday?” Peter asked, uncertainly - Remus still wasn’t sure that Peter fully understood what they were doing.

“Don’t see why not,” Remus shrugged. “Why do you want to get up early though?”

“It’s a Hogsmeade weekend and I was going to meet… um… no, nothing.”

“Who??”

“Please don’t tell James or Sirius!”

“Who, Pete?”

“Desdemona Lewis.”

“Oh… No, I won’t tell anyone.”

Remus went to bed with a heavy heart that night. He felt he had lost every one of his friends now - the only one who didn’t constantly want to talk about their relations with the opposite sex was Lily. And he felt a bit guilty around Lily, since inadvertently ruining their Potions project.

To be fair, everyone’s in the class had been ruined;

“Oh dear,” Professor Slughorn had scratched his head, completely confounded by the useless girding potions everyone had produced. “Did everybody leave them to brew for the correct amount of time? It must be precisely twenty-four hours…”

Everyone had, of course. Or thought they had. It was really Sirius’s fault, Remus told himself.

Sirius, of course, found the entire episode immensely amusing, and it only inspired him to take even greater risks. The problem was, Remus couldn't catch him at it. Every time it was Sirius's turn to go down and change the clocks, he made sure he was going with either Peter or James. And whenever Remus volunteered to go, Sirius took a step back.

"I know what you're doing," Remus told him, when they woke up one 'morning' with the sun already at its' highest point in the sky.

"And I know what you're doing," Sirius replied with a grin, "Goody two-shoes."

It was true - Remus was going down every second night and trying to fix whatever havoc Sirius had caused, so that by the third week of November the clocks were all swinging wildly this way and that, sometimes altered by as much as four hours. The main problem was that Sirius wouldn't tell him how much he was changing the time by, so Remus was having to guess at his corrections.

"What the hell is going on?!" Mary said, one morning at breakfast, after perhaps only four hours sleep - Remus regretted that, but it had been the only way to reclaim ground in Sirius's ridiculous tug of war.

Breakfast had become a very odd event - it seemed that the house elves in the kitchen were more confused than anyone else about the time of day, and were in disagreement over which meal they ought to be serving. As such, scrambled eggs were being served alongside mashed potato and gravy; legs of lamb accompanied cornflakes, and once or twice everyone had arrived for dinner and nothing at all had appeared. Sirius and James were loving every minute of this, of course.

"What do you mean?" James asked, nonchalantly. Sirius was not speaking that morning, only yawning and occasionally scowling at Remus.

"Isn't anyone else sleeping really badly?" Mary asked, desperately. She was starting to look quite frazzled - her dark hair was coming out of her braids in thick corkscrews, and her eyes were slightly bloodshot. "And what's up with the weather?"

"Yeah, it was really dark yesterday," Marlene yawned, "But today it started getting light at six or something."

"Hogwarts is a very mysterious and magical place," James said. "Who are we to question its inner workings?"

Meanwhile, Remus was very concerned about the upcoming full moon. He thought it was due soon, anyway, he couldn't really be sure. If Sirius didn't slow down, he might lose track altogether and just have to lock himself in the shrieking shack for a week. He didn't know how to explain that to Madam Pomfrey - but if he didn't do something then he ran the risk of transforming somewhere in the castle.

* * *

Wednesday 27th November 1974

By the fourth week, Remus didn't think that any of the marauders knew what on earth the time was supposed to be - even in the vaguest sense. He'd given up trying to correct Sirius at all, and instead thought it best to just let things play out. Things finally came to a head when, while yawning their way through a Transfiguration lesson, Peter suddenly looked out of the window with a gasp.

"What is it, Pettigrew?" McGonagall snapped - she had been much more irritable than usual. Actually, everyone had, and Remus resolved never to muck up anyone's sleep pattern again.

“N-nothing, Professor.” Peter looked down, hurriedly.

But it was too late; the whole class, including McGonagall, was now staring out of the window too - and watching the sun rise at eleven o’clock in the morning.

“Oh for goodness sake!” McGonagall said. “Class, I want all of you in the Great Hall at once. I’m getting the Headmaster.”

Less than an hour later, Remus was feeling extremely nervous surrounded by the rest of the school as they waited for Dumbledore to address them. He hadn’t seen much of the head teacher that year; the old man was often absent from meals now, and McGonagall had said he was simply out on business for the ministry. Still, he was here now, and Remus couldn’t stop the sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach as the white haired wizard approached the lectern.

“What’s going on, d’you think?” Lily asked Remus. Mary was snoozing on her shoulder.

“No idea,” he replied, hoping he sounded convincing.

“It seems,” Dumbledore began. He spoke very softly for a teacher, Remus had always thought - but somehow everyone fell quiet anyway. “That we have some pranksters in our midst.”

At once, everyone in the room turned to look at Remus, Sirius, James and Peter. Remus kept staring ahead, ignoring them; Peter began to shake his knee anxiously, glancing at James, who smiled back at his audience in an affable manner. Remus couldn’t see what Sirius was doing, but it was sure to be ridiculous and highly disrespectful. Still, Dumbledore made no accusations, only smiled pleasantly and continued, “Rest assured that the clocks are now being corrected, and measures taken to ensure that this cannot happen again. In the meantime, I think we could all do with a bit of rest - I am cancelling the rest of today’s classes, to be resumed at our usual - and correct - time tomorrow morning.”

There was a collective murmur of appreciation at this news.

“Yes!” Sirius hissed, “Result!”

“Now,” Dumbledore raised his arms, “Off you go, use this time wisely!”

Everyone in the hall got to their feet and began to trudge wearily towards the doors. The marauders were just about to follow suit, when McGonagall appeared behind them, placing a hand on Sirius and James’s shoulders.

“Wait.” She said. “Not you four.”

Remus gulped, as the rest of the school vacated the room, until it was just the four of them, Dumbledore and McGonagall.

“So,” Dumbledore smiled, kindly, “Which one of you came up with the idea, eh? Or was it a collective effort?”

The four boys looked at each other, then down at their laps. Dumbledore chuckled, “Admirable.” He said, approvingly, “Then we shall have to treat you all equally, hm? I think ten points each from Gryffindor, do you agree, Professor McGonagall.”

“At the very least!” She nodded, “And detentions!”

“I shall leave that in your capable hands, then. Just one thing, boys.”

They all looked up, wincing as they braced themselves for the telling off.

“You’re all clearly very gifted wizards,” Dumbledore continued to smile. Peter gave an odd sort of squeak. “That much is clear. It was a simple spell, yes, but highly effective. That kind of thinking will take you far. But perhaps a little more forethought and planning next time? You might not have been discovered quite so quickly.”

“Three weeks isn’t bad!” Sirius blurted out. James kicked him, but Dumbledore laughed. McGonagall turned red with anger,

“Then it shall be three weeks detention, Black!”

Sirius quickly bowed his head, and James muttered under his breath,

“Idiot.”

Fourth Year: December

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I'm torn between the light and dark

Where others see their targets, divine symmetry

Should I kiss the viper's fang?

Or herald loud the death of man

I'm sinking in the quicksand of my thoughts

And I ain't got the power anymore

Wednesday 4th December 1974

They were all given three weeks detention with McGonagall - which meant lines and extra homework - and were banned from Hogsmeade until the new year, much to Peter's horror. Poor Miss Lewis would have to wait.

This also meant that Remus wouldn't be able to buy any Christmas presents for his friends, but he was grateful for that excuse. He had so far amounted a small fortune (in his eyes, anyway) of ten galleons and twelve sickles. It wasn't anywhere near James's inheritance, of course, or even Sirius's bequeathal from his uncle - but it was more than Remus had ever had, even in muggle money.

He'd already started making plans for the moment he turned seventeen. Learning how to apparate was key - he had to be sure to get that right. Then, he would buy enough supplies and begin his search. And he thought he knew where to start.

This term, ever since he had been back at Hogwarts, Remus had been reading *The Daily Prophet* cover to cover. He borrowed James's copy, and made notes privately - usually in the library, where the other marauders wouldn't bother him. He was looking for anything; attacks, sightings, rumours. Anything related to werewolves or 'unidentified dark creatures'. There was very little in there - James maintained that this was because the ministry didn't want to frighten anyone.

But there were still clues. Sometimes there were stories about Aurors breaking up 'illegal gatherings' or meetings - always in distant, far flung places; the outer Hebrides, or the Brecon Beacons. And they were *always* the night before the full moon. This was solid evidence, as far as Remus was concerned - Greyback was gathering followers, and no one else seemed to care; even the Aurors were being casual about it. Just like they had been with Lyall.

By early December, Remus was concerned enough to consult Ferox.

This year's Care of Magical Creatures syllabus had proved to be just as fascinating as the year before, and Ferox's dedication to teaching had not waned. He had even hinted at bringing in a real demiguise as a Christmas treat, though Remus had no idea where he was going to get one.

The teacher had taken them all down to the lake for one lesson, where Ferox had held a long, high pitched conversation with one of the merpeople who lived there. No one had the foggiest clue what

they were talking about, but it had been interesting nonetheless, and Remus had made some very useful diagrams.

It was armed with these diagrams, and the accompanying essay, that Remus approached Ferox's office one gloomy afternoon in December. Since both Sirius and James were now on the quidditch team, it was much easier for Remus to sneak away and conduct his own personal business - lately either werewolf hunting or as Hogwart's premiere tobacco supplier. Lily had asked if he wanted to go to the library with her - he thought she must be feeling a bit lonely this term, as she was often asking if he wanted to go here or there with her. He hadn't noticed that she was spending any less time with Mary and Marlene, but who knew with girls?

Anyway, having extricated himself from all other responsibilities, Remus knocked purposefully on the door to Ferox's office.

"Come in," the familiar liverpudlian sing-song voice called out. Remus smiled and stepped inside.

"Hi, professor," he said, clutching his papers.

"Lupin! Sit down, sit down," Ferox beamed up at him from behind his desk. He appeared to be making repairs to a very large golden cage; his desktop covered with tools and wire and other oddments which didn't seem to belong in a teacher's office.

"I've got my merfolk essay here," he put it down on the only free bit of surface space.

"Blimey, Remus, you're keen!" Professor Ferox smiled, tidying away his tools into a leather pouch. "That wasn't due until the last day of term."

Remus shrugged, secretly thrilled,

"I had it finished, so I thought I might as well hand it in now."

"Very good. Fancy a tea?"

"Yes, please."

Ferox pushed the large cage to one side and waved his wand, casually. Ferox's wand was shorter than Remus's, and thicker, made of some knobbly type of wood, as if snapped directly from a tree branch. A teapot appeared from nowhere, closely followed two cups and saucers which clattered noisily onto the table. They were quite old and chipped in places.

"Oops," Ferox grinned, bashfully, "Never had much finesse with charms. That's my Nan's old set, too."

Remus smiled politely, and used his own wand to pour the tea. He found levitation very easy, and Ferox looked impressed. "Nan used to drink it from the saucer and everything," He murmured, nostalgically, lifting the cup to his lips, "Thought it was elegant, bless 'er."

Remus never knew what to say when people started talking about their relatives. It had taken him four years to learn that people who had families did not really want to hear about the experiences of people without them. It made them uncomfortable. Ferox seemed to notice Remus's polite reticence and changed tact, "At this point my Nan would offer a biscuit and a cigarette, but I'm afraid I've run out of both."

Remus raised an eyebrow and fished inside his pocket,

“Here, sir,” he said, offering a box of marlboro’s.

“Ah, so the rumours are true, eh? Our resident bootlegger.”

Remus shrugged again, carefully trying to mask his excitement as Ferox actually accepted a cigarette and lit it neatly with his wand point.

“How’d you do that?!” He asked, trying it with his own wand, to no avail. Ferox chuckled,

“C’mere,” and Remus leaned across the desk to allow Ferox to light his cigarette. “I better not teach you,” the teacher winked, “It’s a terrible habit.”

Remus grinned through the cloud of smoke, taking a long drag.

“So,” Ferox said, leaning back in his chair, “I take it this is more than just a social visit, young Lupin?”

“Erm... yes, sort of,” Remus nodded, clearing his throat, “I just had a few more questions about... well I didn’t know who to ask, and you said last year I could always come to you.”

“Of course. Is this about your father?”

“Oh no,” Remus shook his head vehemently, “Not him.”

He may have sounded a bit more forceful than he meant to - but he was *sick* of Lyall Lupin, and the awful, hollow, guilty feeling he got when he thought about the man. He didn’t want to know any more about the past - this was about the future.

Remus took another puff, letting it steady his nerves. “It’s about Greyback.”

“Remus...”

“I deserve to know.” He said, darkly, losing his smile. “It’s my life.”

Ferox looked at him for a long time, before sighing.

“Just like your dad. Ok, what do you want to know? Not that there’s much I can tell you, mind. Far as anyone knows, he’s still a wanted fugitive.”

“The articles you gave me, one of them said that the ministry thought he was trying to raise an army, that’s why he likes... children.”

“That’s just a rumour.” Ferox said, brows knit together, “There’s no evidence.”

“*I’m* evidence.” Remus said, unconsciously pressing a hand to his side, where the worst scar of all was hidden under his uniform.

“It still doesn’t mean... well, if he’d been trying to do that in the sixties then you’d think we’d know about it by now, eh?”

That was a spurious line of reasoning, in Remus’s opinion, he waved a hand,

“There’ve been attacks, if you read the papers properly. The Dark Lord, he’s the perfect person to encourage Greyback, from what I’ve heard. Something needs to be done to stop people joining them. To stop... people like me from joining him.”

"I don't know what you know about the so-called 'Dark Lord'," Ferox replied, stiffly, "But he's only interested in blood purity. He would consider someone like Greyback a half-breed. Beneath him."

Remus thought of Snape, and the other Slytherins, and immediately dismissed this theory too.

"He might not respect him, but as long as Greyback gets the job done - and if he gets enough followers--"

"You're overestimating his power - both of them. The Dark Lord is just a political upstart, feeding off some perceived oppression; no one takes him seriously. No one who *matters*. And Greyback - well, he's practically a derelict, a raving lunatic. Neither of them have anything substantial to offer their followers."

Remus snorted,

"Yeah, well the ministry doesn't exactly have much to offer *me*, except for a collar and a barred cell."

"Remus, that's not true," Ferox sounded distressed. Remus didn't care.

"Yes it is! I'm nearly fifteen, I'm not a little boy. My job prospects are only *slightly* less shit as a muggle than they are as a wizard. Can't help but notice I'm the *only one* at Hogwarts, can't help but notice I'm not s'posed to tell anyone - oh wait, until I'm seventeen, then I have to tell EVERYONE, right? Then everyone else knows to avoid me in case I get a bit peckish. Greyback might not have much to offer us halfbreeds, but when you haven't got a lot else going for you..."

"Remus, you've got--"

"No! I've READ the laws, and the statutes, and the bullshit fucking registry!"

He stubbed out his cigarette in the dregs of his teacup, furiously. The full moon was weeks away, but his temperature was rising, his heart pounding as he glared at Ferox, challenging him to answer. Ferox himself looked quite shaken, struck dumb. This in itself cooled Remus's temper - he had meant to have a rational discussion, he had wanted to learn things; not yell at his favourite teacher. He pulled out another cigarette and lit it with the matchbook he carried, then pushed the box across the desk to Ferox.

"Keep it." He said, quietly, inhaling, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shout."

"It's ok to shout, Remus," Ferox smiled, weakly, "Especially when someone isn't listening, and you need to be heard."

Remus looked at him, quizzically. Ferox relaxed a bit, "I think you see anger as a weakness, but it isn't. It's good to be angry - and you've got bloody good reason to be. You're right. We *all* need to worry about Voldemort, and Greyback, and the rest of the pureblood crowd. If the ministry is prepared to treat good, clever, thoughtful wizards the way they treat you, then people like the Dark Lord will always have followers."

Remus started at him, stunned.

"But." Ferox said, "There will always be people working against them, too. And as long as we stay angry, they won't win."

"They won't win." Remus repeated. He usually felt embarrassed after an outburst like that, but now

he actually felt calmer - relieved, even.

“And don’t you think for a minute that you have shit prospects.” Ferox raised an eyebrow, “If you think Dumbledore moved heaven and earth to get you an education just to see you end up no better than a squib, then you don’t know Dumbledore, my boy.”

* * *

Friday 20th December 1974

As December drew on and the nights grew longer, the castle became engulfed in fairy lights and a heavy blanket of snow. Everyone seemed in higher spirits than usual, and more excited to celebrate Christmas than ever before. Owls swooped through the halls at lightning speed, delivering packages and brightly enveloped cards; the Herbology teacher had enchanted holly and ivy to weave itself around every chandelier and bannister; Professor Flitwick could be seen most evenings teaching the portraits to sing carols, and Sirius Black ended the term dressed head to toe in tinsel.

This hadn’t actually been Sirius’s idea - James had started it, using an everlasting sticking charm to affix the decorations to the collars and cuffs of Sirius’s robes while he was asleep. If he’d thought this might embarrass Sirius, he was sorely mistaken - Black adored his new look, and wore it with pride. In fact, by the last day of term, at least fifteen other boys had copied him, as well as a group of girls who had lately taken to following Sirius around.

It seemed that every girl in the school had now found out about the Great Snogging Race - and the effect was not what Remus had hoped for. While Marlene had acted sensibly in rejecting Black’s advances, there were plenty of girls in their year - and even in the year above - who were hoping to help Sirius win the bet. He’d thought this great fun at first, but after almost a month of being followed by a pack of giggling teenagers, receiving heavily scented love notes and being interrupted at almost every turn, he had enlisted Mary as a bodyguard.

Mary was perfect for this - bolshy, ready to speak her mind, and not interested in Sirius at all.

“You’re such a wuss,” she sighed, on the last evening of term, as they all sat around the fireplace together. James was playing with a golden snitch he’d nicked from the games shed, trying to impress Lily, who had her head down and was frantically finishing her Christmas cards.

Peter was nowhere to be found, Marlene was playing a game of chess with Remus, and Sirius had just called Mary to sit closer to him, cautiously eyeing up a group of girls watching him from the corner.

“I’m not a wuss,” he replied, dryly, loosening his tie, “I just like my privacy.”

“You could always just snog one of them,” Mary shot back, stretching out on the couch and draping her legs over Sirius’s lap. He let her. “Wasn’t that the whole point of the bet?”

“Well yeah,” Sirius replied, in a measured tone, “But they weren’t supposed to know about it, I was supposed to win them over with my charm and roguish good looks.”

“You’re not *scared*, are you?” Mary purred.

“I’d be mad *not* to be scared of girls.” Sirius laughed, “You’re all mental.”

“Mary, what’s Darren’s surname?” Lily asked, looking up from her stack of cards.

“Harvey.” Mary said, “Gawd, you’re not sending him a card, are you? You’ve only met him once!”

“It’s nice to get cards at Christmas.” Lily smiled, returning to her writing.

“All right, but don’t send it by owl, he’s a muggle.”

“How have you been writing to him all year?” Remus asked, genuinely interested.

“I send the letters to mum, and she pops them through his letter box. He only lives across the hall. And there’s a phone box just outside Hogsmeade, so we’ve chatted once or twice.”

“I didn’t know there was a phone box!”

“Yeah, it’s a bit ancient - one of the Ravenclaws told me it was a portkey once during the war, but it still works.” She stretched again, “I can’t wait to see him,” she sighed. Sirius pushed her legs away, pretending to lean over and watch the chess game.

“Where are you for Christmas, Remus?” Lily asked, licking her final envelope. “Not staying here, I hope?”

“Lupin and Black are at mine again,” James said, eagerly. Lily gave him a withering look.

“Oh, of course.”

Remus was really looking forward to the Potters this year. He’d only be staying a week, as the full moon fell on the twenty ninth, but that was fine by him - he just couldn’t wait for the presents and the decorations, and Mrs Potter’s cooking.

“I’m starving.” Sirius yawned, lazily, “Where’s Pete? Can we send him to the kitchens for us?”

“No idea where he is actually.” James said, “Haven’t seen him since dinner.”

“Is he packing?” Lily suggested.

“I’ll go and check,” Remus stood up, stretching. “I’m hungry too, I think there are some cauldron cakes in my trunk...”

“You don’t say...” Sirius got up too, following him. Remus sighed. Sirius spent half his time begging for sweets off the rest of them. Not that he wasn’t generous with his own - he just very rarely seemed to have any.

Peter was not in the dorm room, but the cauldron cakes were.

“Wonder what’s happened to him.” Remus rubbed the back of his head.

“Check the map,” Sirius said, spraying crumbs everywhere, mouth full of cake. Remus raised an eyebrow but said nothing, and retrieved the map from his bedside table.

He cast the locator spell, and the map quickly highlighted a small flag with the name ‘Peter Pettigrew’. It looked as though he was in a broom cupboard near the Charms classroom.

“*Wossee doon therr ?*” Sirius mumbled, stuffing another cake in his mouth. Remus tutted this time, folding up the map.

“I dunno. You don’t reckon the Slytherins got him?”

“Maybe?” Sirius swallowed, “If they put a binding spell on him he might be stuck there all night. Let’s go and get him, then.”

“Shall I get James?”

“Err...” Sirius glanced at the door, and Remus knew at once that he was dreading having to pass the gauntlet of girls waiting down there. “Nah, let’s take the cloak and sneak down - it won’t take long, and only two of us fit anyway.”

Remus shrugged by way of consent. If it didn’t take too long to rescue Peter then maybe they could go to the kitchens afterwards. Sirius had finished his cauldron cakes. They huddled under the cloak together and hurried quietly downstairs, past James and the girls, out through the portrait hole.

“Bloody typical of Peter,” Sirius huffed, under his breath, “Four years as a marauder and still crap at defensive spells.”

“Maybe they attacked from behind,” Remus suggested, “Or maybe there were a lot of them.”

He didn’t know why, but he loved contradicting Sirius. James called it bickering, but Sirius had never given any sign that it bothered him. On they went, through the shadowy stone hallways, towards the Charms corridor.

“Here, is it that one?” Sirius whispered, as they reached a door.

“Yeah,” Remus replied, “He’s in there.” He could smell him.

“Ok, wand ready?... One, two, THREE!”

Sirius yanked open the door quickly, much to the surprise of Peter - who was very much not in danger - and Desdemona Lewis, who shrieked,

“Who’s there?!” She stared around, pale and wide eyed, her hair mussed up and her lips very pink and wet. Pete stared about as well, slightly more suspiciously, but just as rumped,

“Probably just Peeves.”

Sirius began to shudder with laughter, and Remus quickly clamped a hand over his mouth, trying to pull him away from the cupboard. Poor Peter.

“I’m going back to my common room, I’ll get in so much trouble if I’m caught out of bounds again,” Desdemona was saying, straightening her blouse. She kissed Peter dainty on the nose, “See you tomorrow, Petey? On the train?”

“Yeah... ok...” Peter replied, very distracted, still staring about, looking for their invisible assailant. Remus thanked whatever god there was for his superior strength, as Sirius fought madly to get free and cause even more mischief.

Remus did not let him go until Desdemona had disappeared around the corner. Peter was wise to the situation by then anyway.

“All right, show yourselves!” He pulled out his wand just as Remus released Sirius and they both burst out from under the invisibility cloak.

“I KNEW IT!” Peter yelled,

“YOU SNEAK!” Sirius crowed, laughing so hard he was holding his stomach, “How long had that been going on?!”

“A week,” Peter replied, turning red, “How did you find me?”

“A WEEK?! Merlin, Pettigrew! What do you think you’re about, lying to us for a whole week?!”

“You would have teased me!”

“We tease you anyway.”

“Can we please go to the kitchens now?” Remus sighed.

“Wait ‘til James hears about this!” Sirius said, sounding awestruck, “I can’t believe it. I really can’t. Peter Pettigrew: Ladies Man.”

“Oh, shut up.” Peter sulked, shoving his hands in his pockets. “I’m going to the common room, I’m not hungry.”

“Well, the way you were eating Lewis’s face off...”

“Shut up!” Peter disappeared around the next corridor.

Sirius laughed all the way to the kitchens, and was still slightly hysterical on the way back, even laden with treats and goodies from the house elves.

“At least this means that stupid snogging race is over.” Remus said, pleasantly, as they approached the portrait of the fat lady. Sirius stopped dead in his tracks, causing Remus to bump into him, nearly dropping his bottle of butterbeer.

“Ugh, I didn’t think of that!”

“Well, you don’t have to think about it now,” Remus snapped, rubbing his elbow where he’d banged it, “Pete won.”

“You’re right Moony. Ugggh! That means that if I don’t get a snog by the end of this year then I’m more of a loser than *Pettigrew*!”

Remus sighed, heavily.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Quicksand' by David Bowie.

Fourth Year: Christmas

Monday 23rd December 1974

Though Hogwarts had been as picturesque as a Christmas card under its blanket of highland snow, the marauders stepped off the train in London to grey, southern drizzle. The weather continued in much the same way for most of the Christmas break, meaning that sledging was off the cards this year, much to Remus's disappointment.

It meant that the first few days before Christmas were pretty boring, and they made up for it by making regular trips into the village, underneath Mr Potter's huge black umbrella, and spent long afternoons in the muggle cinema there.

Remus had convinced them to go - he hadn't been to see a film since he'd started at Hogwarts, and Ste's gang had been talking about *Death Wish* all summer, so he was dying to see it. It was just as exciting as he'd hoped; full of revenge and gore - and Charles Bronson reminded him a bit of Professor Ferox. James and Sirius were more interested in figuring out how the projector worked - which suited Remus fine, because it meant they agreed to go with him twice.

However, boredom soon got the better of them, and on the third visit to the picturehouse, a distraction presented itself in the form of a group of girls queuing at the ticket booth. At once, James and Sirius stopped discussing the ins and outs of visual perception versus frame rate, and started acting very oddly indeed. James made more of an effort to flatten his hair than ever, while Sirius began leaning casually against the wall as if he was James Dean.

The girls obviously noticed, and kept glancing back and then giggling amongst themselves. They must be freezing, wearing miniskirts in December, Remus thought to himself. Finally, the girls finished buying their tickets and went into the second screen.

"Moony," Sirius said, not taking his eyes off the gaggle of long legs that had just passed, "How about we see something different today?"

"Yeah," James nodded, blankly.

Remus looked up at the poster above the door. *The Great Gatsby*. He screwed up his face,

"Ugh, it's a *romance*, though, what do you want to see that for?" He protested. But it was too late, they were already halfway in.

Remus settled down in the front row and resigned himself to his fate. It might not be that bad - he'd liked Robert Redford in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* - he wasn't as cool as Charles Bronson, but he might shoot someone, at the very least.

Half an hour later and - as much as he didn't want to admit it - Remus was thoroughly immersed in the film, for all its pastel shades and silly costumes. There had been no shooting so far, but he was hoping for the best, and in the meantime, was rooting for Daisy to see sense and leave her awful husband.

At some point, Remus glanced to his left, to see if Sirius and James were enjoying the film too - and found that he had been abandoned. Twisting about in his seat, he stared into the darkness behind him, and could just about make out the dark shapes of his two friends sitting in the very back row - both engaged in some kind of horrendous teenage grappling match with two of the girls from earlier.

Mortified, Remus turned around at once, slouching down low in the red velvet seat. He couldn't concentrate on the film now - and he'd been right, anyway; it was a stupid, boring, *girly* romance, and Robert Redford clearly wasn't going to shoot anyone any time soon. In a split second he made his decision and quickly left the theatre.

It was too late to get a ticket for *Death Wish*, and the usher behind the ticket stand was giving him a very pointed look, so he shoved his hands deep in his pockets and sloped out, feeling bitter and mean. The town James's parents lived in was a lot posher than the one Remus had grown up in - it was all pretty red brick cottages and oak trees. There was a big village green at the centre, and Remus could imagine cricket taking place there in the summer. It was raining now, though, and James had the umbrella, so Remus had no choice but to duck for cover under the nearest bus shelter.

There was a little shop, right opposite the bus stop, and he watched it for a while, checking out the simplest entry points. Not that he was going to break in. He definitely *could*; it looked really easy - but what if Mr and Mrs Potter found out? They'd never have him for Christmas again. He thought about going back to the house, but he didn't want to explain why he'd left Sirius and James in the picturehouse like that. Pricks. He kicked the side of the shelter with his heavy boots. An old woman, walking past with her little scottie dog tutted at him loudly, and he swore in return, throwing up a middle finger.

Even *James* had let him down now. James! Whose pure and honest adoration for Lily Evans had been the one thing which convinced Remus that snogging might not be that disgusting after all. He'd expected something like this from Sirius, who had never had any kind of impulse control anyway, but *James* ?!

"Oi, Moony!" As if by magic, James and Sirius appeared on the other side of the road, underneath the big black umbrella. He tried to ignore them, but it was a bit stupid, seeing as they were the only three people on the street.

"Where are you off to?" Sirius grinned, as they crossed to join him under the bus shelter.

"Just sitting here." Remus shrugged.

"Why'd you leave?"

"Could ask you the same!"

"We only popped off for a minute..."

"Ugh, I don't want to hear about it." Remus covered his ears. He glared at James, "What about Lily? What about 'it's not time yet, but I don't mind'?" Remus parroted back the words James had spoken in November.

James looked stricken for a moment, but Sirius laughed heartily and slapped Remus on the shoulder,

"Oh come off it. Evans isn't going to care if Potter snogged some muggle girl when he was fourteen. Calm down, Moony."

That did it. If there was anything more likely to send Remus into a rage, it was being told to 'calm down'.

"No!" He growled, "You made me watch that stupid girls film just so you could grope a couple of muggle birds in the back row!"

Sirius tossed his dark hair and rolled his eyes,

“Merlin, Lupin - we can go and see your beloved Charles Bronson *tomorrow* , if you really want. I mean, *excuse us* if we want to act like *normal* teenagers for five minutes.”

Something about this insult struck Remus so sharply, that if he'd had his wand he'd have cursed Sirius right then and there. As it was, he only had his fists - fortunately he was pretty good with those, and punching was often a lot more satisfying than cursing. By the time James had wrenched them apart and stood between them, Sirius's nose was extremely bloody, and Remus could feel the beginnings of a black eye forming.

“What's *wrong* with you two?!” James huffed, dragging them both through the rain back to his parents house.

“He's a tosser!” Remus spat, trying to keep the drizzle out of his sore eye.

“He's a wanker!” Sirius returned, stuffily, holding his wet jumper up against his nose.

“You're both dickheads,” James said, firmly, as they reached the front gate.

* * *

Mrs Potter fixed them both up very quickly - she was just as quick at healing spells as Madam Pomfrey - then gave them a good telling off, with Mr Potter standing behind her, trying not to smile and saying “boys will be boys, Effie dear...”

Afterwards, Remus went straight up to the spare room and sat on the bed for the rest of the day doing his holiday homework. He knew it was silly and childish to sulk, but if he had to see Sirius again he couldn't be sure he wouldn't swing for him. He thought about Ferox telling him ‘It's good to be angry’ - but somehow didn't think that was what the teacher meant.

Was he jealous? Jealous that all his friends had copped off with a girl now, and he hadn't? Maybe that was it. Remus couldn't really ignore the fact that he was the only one of his friends who wasn't completely driven by his hormones - *like a normal teenager* , as Sirius had so kindly put it. Ouch; there was that pain again. Remus drew his knees up under his chin, making himself as small as possible. If he had a galleon for every way in which he was *not normal* .

He went down for dinner, but didn't talk to James or Sirius, limiting himself only to polite interchanges with Mr and Mrs Potter. After they were excused from the table, he went straight back upstairs and curled up under the duvet with a book until he fell asleep.

He dreamed that he was back in the cinema, trying to watch a strange combination of *The Great Gatsby* and *Death Wish* - in which Professor Ferox really was Charles Bronson, black moustache and all, aiming his pistol at the gleaming socialites of West Egg. Something kept nudging Remus's elbow, distracting him from the film - he turned and saw that it was Peter and Desdemona, writhing about in the seat beside him, lips locked.

Annoyed, Remus got up and sat in the row behind, returning to the film. Soon, something else bothered him - it was Mary and Darren. Remus had of course never met Darren, and the boy in the dream looked just like Muciber, for some reason. They were snogging too. Disgusted, Remus tried to get up once more, but tripped over Lily and James, who were rolling in the aisle.

“For god's sake!” He shouted. Lily looked up at him and laughed - so did Mary, and now Peter and James too.

Sirius appeared at the very back of the theatre, his body silhouetted by the whirring projector,

“Never mind him,” he laughed along with the others, “He’s not like us.”

Remus spun around just in time to see Ferox shoot Robert Redford, then woke up with a start.

He was hot and sweating under the heavy duvet, and had to fight to free himself. Feeling very silly for having had a nightmare at his age, he clambered out of the large four poster bed and headed for the nearest bathroom. The clock on the landing read midnight, so he didn’t turn any lights on, though he could see a faint yellowish glow seeping out from under James’s bedroom door.

Remus used the loo, then washed his hands and face, taking a few sips from the cold tap before wiping himself dry on his pyjama sleeves. Feeling much better, he returned to his bedroom, just as James’s door swung open.

“Bloody hell, it’s you, Moony!” James whispered, sounding relieved, “What you doing creeping round in the dark?!”

Remus shrugged and whispered back,

“I can see in the dark. Didn’t want to wake anyone up.”

James nodded, and opened his door a bit wider,

“Thought you might be Gully, spying on us for mum or something. Come in, eh? Let’s all be mates again.”

It didn’t take much convincing for Remus to agree. Fighting took up too much energy, especially when you all lived together. He still didn’t really want to talk to Sirius, but he went in for James’s sake.

Sirius was sitting cross legged on James’s bed, and frowned when he saw Remus. James sighed,

“Come on, we’re all friends, right? It’s Christmas.”

Sirius nodded, solemnly. Remus nodded back. He joined them on the bed, where he was surprised to see they were pouring over some spellbooks.

“Homework?” He asked.

“Prank.” James replied. “Haven’t worked out the kinks yet, though.”

“Oh, ok.” Remus nodded. And then, because he didn’t want it to be awkward any more, he asked; “How’s your nose, Black?”

“Fine,” Sirius grinned at him, relaxing into humour at once, “You’re losing your touch.”

Remus smirked,

“Oh yeah? Ask Snape. Headbutted him on the train in September.”

“You never did!”

“Yup.”

“Bloody hell,” James laughed, “And he hasn’t tried it on since?”

“Not yet.” Remus said, trying not to sound too nervous about it, “Probably planning something, though. What’s the prank?”

“We’ll um... tell you when we know how to do it. Might not come off right.” James said, quickly, closing the book nearest him. Remus raised an eyebrow and said nothing - this only confirmed a suspicion he’d had for quite some time. He didn’t want to get into any of that now, though, he’d wait and see if anything came of it.

“Sorry I brought up Lily.” He told James, “I didn’t mean it, Sirius is right, she won’t care - if she’s ever stupid enough to go out with you, that is.”

James shoved him playfully,

“Piss off.”

“At least that stupid competition is over now, yeah?” Remus asked, hopefully, looking at Sirius.

“Yeah I s’pose,” Sirius shrugged, “We paid Pete his dues, anyway. What a letdown, though - snogging, I mean. Dunno what all the fuss is about.”

Remus didn’t say anything, though he was secretly pleased. So he *wasn’t* missing out on anything after all.

“It was alright,” James said, diplomatically. “Probably takes practice. Must get better.”

“It had better.” Sirius said, very seriously.

James and Remus burst out laughing.

* * *

Christmas Day 1974

Christmas morning was as dark and gloomy as the previous week had been, and Remus was woken by the noise of the rain pelting against his bedroom window. Still, the Potter's house was as festive as ever, and the five of them settled down to a hearty breakfast with smiles on their faces.

Breakfast was quickly followed by presents - the usual fair of sweets, chocolate, new quills from the Potters, books and socks. Remus was very surprised to receive a hand-knitted scarf from Lily, in Gryffindor red with gold tassels. He felt a bit bad - he hadn’t bought anything for any of the marauders this year, let alone any of the girls. She’d never given him a gift before, except for the reading aid - which, he had to admit, had been a pretty good present. He resolved to get something for her next time they went to Hogsmeade.

They were just finishing up with the presents, Mrs Potter vanishing the crumpled up wrapping paper with a sweep of her wand - when a loud, mournful song sounded in the hallway. It was a high pitched, haunting melody - completely unnatural and completely beautiful. They all turned at once, Mr and Mrs Potter withdrawing their wands in a duelling stance, and a strange, ethereal silver bird flew into the room, circling their heads. Remus recognised it at once as a phoenix - or something like the ghost of one.

“Dumbledore,” Mr Potter said, quietly, as the silver phoenix settled magisterially on the mantelpiece. Much to Remus’s surprise, the bird opened its beak and spoke in their headmaster’s voice.

“There has been an attack. I will be with you shortly - do not allow anyone else entry.”

And with that, the phoenix vanished into thin air. They were all quiet for a while, before Mrs Potter spoke, placing a hand on James’s shoulder, as if she just needed to touch her son.

“Oh Monty, an attack!”

“No need to panic,” Mr Potter said calmly, “Albus will be here soon. Boys, finish cleaning up here, eh? I’ll be in my study.”

They tidied up in silence, all waiting to see what would happen next. An attack - what could that mean? Remus’s mind went straight to Greyback - but it wasn’t a full moon, so unlikely to have been werewolves. Could it be Voldemort? Or were there other dark wizards out there? Guiltily, he looked over at Sirius, who was staring out of the window at the rain, looking pale and shocked. *His* family were dark wizards. Did he know anything about it? Surely not, Remus quickly dismissed the idea, feeling even worse; Sirius hadn’t been home since the summer, and it was common knowledge that his family hated him.

Finally, after what felt like a decade, but can only have been twenty minutes, there was a *CRACK* of apparition outside, and Mr Potter was at the front door. Mrs Potter joined him, and James, Sirius and Remus hung back in the hallway, watching.

The door opened and Dumbledore stood there looking very grave, completely dry despite the rain beating down in sheets.

“Fleamont, Euphemia,” he nodded politely.

Mr Potter held up his wand,

“What was the last thing we spoke about?”

“Your son having broken his record for number of detentions this term.” Dumbledore smiled, glancing at James, who turned red. This apparently satisfied Mr Potter, who stepped back to allow Dumbledore entry.

“Come in, Dumbledore, would you like some tea?” Mrs Potter asked, taking his travelling cloak and ushering him into the living room.

“Upstairs, boys.” Mr Potter said, sternly. James looked about to argue, but Dumbledore stepped in for him.

“If you wouldn’t mind, Fleamont, I think it best that the boys hear this. It will be all over the papers tomorrow anyway.”

Mr Potter looked at his wife, then nodded. The small party sat down in the large living room, waiting for Gully to come in with the tea. It was a very odd scene; Christmas cards still glittering on the walls, tinsel sparkling along the picture rails, opened presents piled up under the tree - and Dumbledore, still looking uncharacteristically serious in midnight blue velvet robes. Sirius, James and Remus sat squashed up on one sofa, while Mr Potter remained standing, pacing the room.

“An attack, then?” He finally said, impatient.

“I’m afraid so. The Fraser family, in Newcastle.”

“Fraser? Never heard of them.”

“No. Mr and Mrs Fraser were both muggleborn. They had two children not yet old enough for Hogwarts, but as far as we know, showing signs of magical ability.”

Remus winced at the past tense. Mr Potter had clearly noticed this too, for he looked very pale and tired all of a sudden.

“All four of them?”

“Yes.”

Mrs Potter looked like she was about to cry,

“Children!” She gasped. “Children!”

“And do we know for sure?” Mr Potter continued, anxiously, “We know it was... him?”

“Voldemort, yes. He left a mark.”

“A mark?”

“It will be in the papers tomorrow, I imagine. The Daily Prophet was there before I was alerted.”

“But what does it mean? Who were the Frasers?”

“Mr Fraser worked for St Mungo’s,” Dumbledore explained, “He recently raised a petition with the ministry suggesting that healers receive training in muggle healing techniques - first aid, I believe he called it. This didn’t go down very well with certain factions, I’m sure you can imagine.”

“I think I remember Darius saying something,” Mr Potter nodded, leaning a hand on the mantelpiece thoughtfully, “But to kill!”

“It hasn’t been the first time,” Dumbledore said, darkly, “But it is the first time they have made themselves known. This mark that was left behind - it has been seen elsewhere. Some of the old families have adopted it; a kind of secret sign of their allegiance to Voldemort. Only not so secret, any more.”

“Which families?” Sirius said, suddenly, looking at Dumbledore. He was tense all over, Remus could feel it. Dumbledore looked at him kindly,

“There is so far nothing to link the Blacks to this attack.”

“So far.” Sirius repeated. “But you know they... they’re...”

“It doesn’t help anybody to jump to conclusions,” Dumbledore held up a hand, “The situation is grave, yes, but we must not lose our heads, or allow emotion to cloud our judgement. There are difficult times ahead, and we will all need each other to be vigilant.”

He said this directly to Sirius, and seemed to be speaking to James and Remus too. Remus felt an uncomfortable twisting in his abdomen - he didn’t understand everything, but he knew that some great responsibility had settled on their shoulders. One he wasn’t sure he could live up to.

“I’m not trying to frighten anyone,” Dumbledore continued, as if he had read Remus’s mind, “But nor do I wish to devalue the seriousness of today’s events. I am working quickly to gather support, a line of defence against Voldemort. I have already spoken to a number of trustworthy associates within the ministry - Fleamont, can I count on you?”

“Of course.” Mr Potter said at once, “Have you spoken to the Weasleys? The Prewetts? The Bones’s?”

Dumbledore nodded, smiling,

“All on my list, of course.”

“We can help!” James spoke up. Mrs Potter sucked in her breath, her eyes still very pink.

“Yeah!” Sirius said, eager to show himself equal to James. “You can depend on us, sir.”

Remus didn’t say anything, but he nodded along, hoping that Dumbledore knew that he too had chosen his side.

“I hope it won’t come to that.” Dumbledore was smiling, his forget-me-not blue eyes twinkling with emotion for his pupils. “But thank you, boys.”

“No!” Mrs Potter said, “They’re children, Dumbledore.”

“I’m of age in two years!” Sirius said, straightening up, asserting his position as the eldest marauder. “And we’re the best in the year at defensive spells!”

“And hexes,” James put in, then quickly shut up, seeing the look his mother shot him.

Dumbledore chuckled, softly.

“Indeed.” He said, “Your mother is quite right, however. All I ask is that you are on your guard, and that you look after each other. Now, I must be going, I have other calls to make. Fleamont,” Dumbledore stood up and shook Mr Potter’s hand, “I will be in touch. Euphemia,” he turned to Mrs Potter apologetically, “Merry Christmas. I’m afraid I won’t be attending your party, tonight.”

“We may as well cancel it,” Mrs Potter rubbed her arms, as if the room had turned cold, “It seems disrespectful.”

“Enjoy your holiday, boys - Remus, Madam Pomfrey will meet you at the Three Broomsticks’ floo stop on Sunday morning.”

Remus nodded, obediently, and with that, Dumbledore vanished with a loud *CRACK*.

Fourth Year: January

Wednesday 8th January 1975

Dumbledore was quite right - the Fraser family's murder was front page news on boxing day, followed by a series of features and articles on the mounting war, which dominated the rest of the Christmas break.

It was the first time Remus - or any of them - ever saw the dark mark, and they had no idea then that it was a symbol they would fear for the rest of their lives. A great black skull with a gaping mouth, and a long ropey serpent writhing forth. It was distinctly Slytherin-esque, and as soon as they were back at Hogwarts Sirius blasted the remaining snake motifs off of his trunk.

"Careful, mate," James said, as smoke from Sirius's spell filled the room, "You might be ruining a family heirloom there."

"I don't give a shit." Sirius replied, firing his wand at the blackened wood once more, for good measure, "It's mine, and I don't want anything of mine to have that ruddy mark on it."

It was pointless trying to reason with him. Since Dumbledore's visit to the Potters Sirius's hatred for anything remotely Slytherin had increased tenfold. He had been using hexes to defend younger students from Slytherins all year, but now he seemed to be actively seeking out trouble.

"The war isn't happening *here* ." Remus tried telling him once, after his third detention in as many days, "Dumbledore told us to be vigilant, not start fights."

"The war is everywhere." Sirius replied, and James nodded in agreement. "Anyway, *you* can talk, what about you and Snape?"

"That," Remus replied, piously, "Was personal."

It was true; he didn't hate Snape because he was a dark wizard, or a Slytherin, or anything like that. Remus didn't like Snape because he was a nosey busybody - that, and nobody *really* liked Snape, except Lily.

Actually, Remus thought to himself, as he looked across the common room at Lily, sitting by Marlene working on some sort of transfiguration spell on a pair of shoes, even Lily hadn't been hanging around Severus very much these days. Perhaps they'd fallen out. The redhead looked up and met his eyes, smiling brightly. He smiled back. James, sitting next to him, waved, and Lily rolled her eyes and returned to the spell she was working on.

"Doesn't she know how much I've matured?" James sighed, heavily, thumbing the pages of his textbook roughly.

"I dunno if snogging a muggle in the back of the cinema really counts as maturing." Remus replied, rescuing the manhandled book and smoothing down the corners James had bent.

"I didn't mean *that* ," James grinned, "Just like... in general. I don't get it, I get on with Marlene ok."

"You're on the quidditch team with Marlene," Peter said, "You've got stuff in common with her."

(Peter had become very wise, since getting a girlfriend.)

“So, what,” James said, slowly, “You think I should try and get Lily on the quidditch team?”

Peter tutted, pitifully,

“Why don’t you find out something you *both* have in common? Like how me and Desdemona both like chess, and cheese sandwiches, and--”

“We’ve got nothing in common,” James replied, dreamily, “That’s why I like her.”

“Never going to happen, then.” Peter sniffed, with an air of finality. James looked crestfallen.

“Don’t listen to him,” Remus said, taking pity, “People don’t just go out with people because they’re the same, that would be boring. Opposites attract, and all that.”

“Yeah, you’re right, Moony!” James cheered up. “Maybe I *should* find out what sort of stuff she likes, though...”

“Er... yeah, might be a start.” Remus shook his head, returning to his Charms essay. He’d made his peace with the girl-obsession now; it was easier to just nod along and pretend to be sympathetic.

Fortunately, most of James and Sirius’s attention was taken up with training for the upcoming quidditch match against Slytherin, which was set for early February. With the war looming over everyone, the competition between the two houses had taken on a new and important meaning, and Sirius and James treated their positions on the team as full time occupations.

As a consequence, Remus saw very little of them at the beginning of the spring term - he spent much of his time in the library, as usual, and when the other two weren’t on the pitch practicing (with Peter watching, of course), they were in detention for one thing or another. There was hardly time to work on the map, or even plan a new prank; the marauders passed each other like ships in the night.

The situation grew so extreme that when the first Hogsmeade weekend rolled around halfway through January, Remus found himself without anyone to go with. He almost considered not going at all, until Lily brought it up after Potions one afternoon, suggesting that he go with her and (he assumed) Mary and Marlene. It sounded like a nice enough way to spend his saturday, and he remembered that he still owed Lily a present for Christmas.

As agreed, Remus met Lily in the common room on saturday morning, and they started down towards the Hogwarts front entrance.

“What happened to the M’s?” Remus asked, surprised when he found they were alone. Lily blushed, but that might have been the cold air,

“I thought it could just be the two of us, this time.”

“Fair enough.” He smiled. He liked Lily’s company very much – almost as much as the marauders.

“So, what are they all in detention for?” She asked, as they trudged through the snow down to the village.

“Various things,” Remus waved his hand, “Peter got caught out of bounds after dark, James got the blame for changing the words on the Slytherin trophies... and I think Sirius hexed a second year.”

“Typical,” Lily tutted.

“Yeah,” Remus grinned, as they trudged through the snow, following the trail of dark robed students ahead of them. “The trophy thing was brilliant though, you have to admit. The charm lasted seven days!”

“It wasn’t a very nice thing to do, though.” Lily frowned. Remus sighed. Why did girls always want to be nice?!

Once they reached the village, they stopped at the stationers, because they both needed new quills. Remus bought one for Sirius and one for Peter too, because they’d asked, telling Lily how Peter pressed too hard on his parchment and snapped two quills a week, leaving blotches everywhere – and how Sirius only used the most expensive brand, because he was vain about his handwriting.

After that they went to the post office, where Remus sent the Potters a package on James’s behalf – it was Mrs Potter’s birthday, he explained to Lily; and James hated missing any occasion to give a gift. Freezing cold by then, they decided that a butterbeer had to be the next port of call, and opted for the Three Broomsticks.

They found a small table by the fireplace and sat companionably, chatting about their lessons and their Christmases. Lily had had a big fight with her sister, which she talked about at great length. Remus told her about going to see *Death Wish*, but didn’t mention Dumbledore’s visit.

“Do you go to the Potter’s every year, then?” Lily asked.

“Yep,” Remus nodded, fervently, “They’re amazing. Me and Sirius always go. And Pete’s only up the road from James, so that’s cool.”

“Are you four *always* together?” Lily looked amused. It rubbed Remus up the wrong way.

“They’re my friends. My best mates.”

“I know that,” she replied, sounding a bit snippy herself, “But you’ve been talking about them all afternoon.”

“Have not.” Remus grunted, defensively, looking into his butterbeer, embarrassed. “...So what If I have?”

“Well I sort of wanted to get to know *you* a bit better, not your friends.” Lily had two red patches in her cheeks now, like a Dutch doll. Remus couldn’t understand why she was so annoyed.

“You *know* me, though. You’ve known me for four years!”

Lily stared at him, disbelieving. Then her expression changed. She ran a hand through her hair and laughed, humourlessly.

“Oh, *Remus* .” She sighed.

“What?”

She shook her head,

“I’m such an idiot. You really have no idea why I wanted to spend the weekend with you, do you?”

He shrugged. She smiled, giving him that pitying look that girls were so good at. “Never mind,” she said, “Don’t worry about it.”

After that, the tone of the afternoon seemed to change. Lily appeared to relax into her usual self

and started joking along with him. She even had a bit of a whinge about Snape, who'd said something extremely rude to Mary recently. Remus never got to the bottom of why she'd been so moody in the first place, but he decided that it might have just been his mentioning his friends - she'd always been clear about finding them annoying. She would only accept the price of a butterbeer from him by way of a present, and assured him that he needn't feel like he owed her anything.

It wasn't until the next day, when Remus, James, Sirius and Peter were sitting at breakfast, that everything became clear. James and Sirius were in their quidditch robes ready for practice, furtively discussing tactics, while Peter listened in with deep interest, nodding and murmuring, "Yeah, exactly," now and then. Remus was checking his book list - he had several to return and a few more he still needed to cross-reference before he could complete his Transfiguration essay.

Marlene settled down next to them, in her own red robes, and reached for the tea.

"So," she addressed Remus, "How did yesterday go?"

"Hm?" he asked, looking up from his parchment, "Yesterday?"

"You and Lily, in Hogsmeade!" She was giving him a very knowing smile. "She won't tell us what happened, so it must be good."

"What are you talking about?!"

"Yeah," Sirius looked up, curiously, "What *are* you talking about, McKinnon?"

"Didn't he tell you?" She stirred sugar into her tea, innocently, "Remus and Lily went on a date yesterday."

"What?!" James, Sirius and Remus all exclaimed at the same time. Sirius began to laugh,

"*Moony* on a date?!"

"With Evans?!" James looked horrified.

"Bloody hell!" Peter said.

"It wasn't a date!" Remus said, slamming down his quill. As he said the words, he felt a horrible sinking feeling - *had* it been a date? How were you supposed to know, if people just ambushed you like that?! He looked at James, desperately, "But I don't fancy Lily, she's just a friend!"

"Yeah... I know, mate." James said, though Remus didn't think he sounded very sure. "It's fine. I'll... see you after practice."

With that, James got up and left the table. Sirius stared after him for a moment, then looked at Remus, then back at James, before shrugging helplessly and getting up to follow his friend out of the hall. Peter followed shortly after, and Remus lay his head on the table, groaning.

"Wow, sorry, Remus," Marlene said, very quietly, "I had no idea. Um... James really fancies her, then?"

Remus groaned again, before getting up and grabbing his books.

"I'm off to the library." He said, not looking at her.

He didn't go to the library, though, in case Marlene went to find him there or - even worse - told Lily and Mary where he was. For the first time since his second year, Remus went into hiding.

The problem with this, of course, was how much he'd grown since his second year. Many of his usual nooks and crannies were simply too small now. In the end, he settled himself behind the statue of the hump-backed witch, just inside the passageway to Honeyduke's. It was dark, but he lit his wand for light, and the faint smell of chocolate was very comforting.

He tried to read, but his brain wouldn't let him concentrate - it seemed to just want to keep playing his visit to Hogsmeade over and over again. Had Lily said something he had missed? Had it been in her body language, maybe; had she dropped hints? Would James have understood them? Would Sirius have? It was very unfair, Remus thought to himself, pitifully. Lily was a very good friend, why would she want to muddle it all up with feelings and holding hands, and *kissing* ?!

He really hoped he wouldn't have to talk to her about it, now. Maybe she was just as embarrassed as he was. Worst of all, what if James never spoke to him again? He didn't know how to explain that he didn't see Lily in that way - not when every other Gryffindor in their year seemed hellbent on coupling up.

Maybe he ought to have snogged Marlene when she'd offered, back in November. He wondered if they'd all leave him alone once he got it over with. *You have to start snogging girls some time* , he told himself. *Everybody does - it's normal*. But not Lily - he couldn't do that to James. In fact, Remus decided, that was probably the very reason he wasn't interested in her - because she was otherwise extremely pretty, funny, kind, clever - and better than him at Charms. Lily was *just* the sort of girl he would fancy, Remus knew for sure, it was just that his friendship with James was much more important.

Feeling very enlightened and self-sacrificing, Remus emerged from his hiding place. He set off down the nearest staircase, planning to go to the quidditch pitch and catch the last few minutes of practice. After that he would do something nice for James - offer to read over his History essay or something. Yes, then everything would be right with the world again.

But, as Remus had once been told; the best laid plans often go wrong. He was just nearing the bottom of the grand staircase - taking it three steps at a time just because he could, and not really looking where he was going - he knocked headlong into another student coming up.

"Watch it, *mudblood* ." Severus Snape snarled, scrambling to his feet, glaring at Remus. Remus tutted,

"Piss off Snivellus, I'm as much a half-blood as you are."

"You and I have *nothing* in common, I assure you." Snape replied haughtily, brushing off his robes.

"I suppose when it comes to hygiene standards--"

"Careful, Loony Lupin," Snape narrowed his beady eyes, "Don't say something you'll regret."

"Oh, bugger off," Remus replied, impatiently, stepping forward, "I haven't got time for this, either curse me now or get out of my way."

Snape stepped to the side at once, giving a flourish with his hand to show Remus that he was free to go. It was disquieting, but Remus couldn't worry about that now, and continued on his way.

Fourth Year: February

James Potter was a much more complex person than he appeared at first glance.

Outwardly, he was happy, self-assured, usually kind (if a little bit arrogant), and generally popular with everybody. He got a lot of detentions, yes, but on the whole he got good marks, and most of the teachers were still quite fond of him. He made the most of being on the quidditch team - messing up his hair deliberately so that he looked like he had just finished flying, wearing his red robes at every opportunity. But no one could say that he hadn't earned the right - you only had to see him play to know that his big-headedness was not misplaced.

Above all, James Potter was loved. His parents spoilt him and instilled in him the notion that there was nothing he couldn't do; that no door would ever be closed to him. Sirius, Peter and Remus all looked up to him, appointing him leader in almost every venture, and all in all, he was admired throughout the school by everyone who mattered, and envied by everyone else.

Except for Lily Evans, of course. She was the thread that seemed to unravel everything else in James's life. Having grown up surrounded by love - freely given and carelessly accepted - James found it very troubling that someone he liked might not like him back. It was the reason he acted like an idiot whenever Lily was present, and the reason that he stopped talking to Remus for a week during the early spring of 1975.

He wasn't being nasty, or doing it deliberately - Remus knew James well enough to understand that. It was just that his feelings had been hurt and - as someone who had rarely experienced hurt feelings - wasn't sure how to handle it. At least Sirius blew up at you when you annoyed him, so that it could be quickly solved. Peter would sulk, and Remus would probably try to throw a punch. But James just went *quiet*.

"He's not angry with you," Sirius explained, when James went to bed one night as soon as Remus arrived in the common room. "He's just feeling sorry for himself."

"He does believe me, though, doesn't he?" Remus asked, anxiously, "I really didn't know it was a date, I don't like Lily in that way!"

"Well... I don't think he thinks you're lying, exactly, but... you are pretty close to Evans, aren't you? Always going around together."

"She's my *friend*." Remus said, exasperated, "I go 'round with Marlene and Mary too, no one thinks I'm going out with them!"

"Actually," Sirius smirked, "There was a rumour last term..."

"Oh for god's sake!"

It was impossible.

As for Lily, she was being reliably mature about the whole thing. Remus assumed Marlene had filled her in on the situation, but she didn't press it, and they were able to continue as Potions partners as normal. James and Sirius, however, had moved their workstation to the back of the room.

By Friday dinner time, Remus was truly miserable. Unlike James, he had not grown up surrounded by love, and he found that his friendship with the marauders had become so important that he

suffered deeply from the loss of it. He still sat with them for meals, but there was an uneasy quiet instead of their usual raucous banter. Sirius kept trying to turn the conversation towards the upcoming Gryffindor vs. Slytherin match, but that only seemed to darken the mood.

Making matters worse, Lily, Mary and Marlene had sat themselves close to Remus - they were feeling sorry for him, and, being girls, were trying to cheer him up by doing exactly the wrong thing.

"I'm looking forward to the match," Mary smiled, cheerfully, "All of the Hufflepuffs and Ravensclaws I've spoken to are supporting Gryffindor too."

Lily sighed, heavily,

"Why does it always have to be so black and white? No one's good all over or bad all over, not even Slytherins."

"You can't blame us, Lily," Marlene replied, "Even if it's not all of them, most of the Slytherins have been utterly foul this year."

"Speak of the devil..." Mary lowered her voice, suddenly, shooting a filthy look over Lily's shoulder.

Lily and Remus turned around to see Severus Snape standing there, with an odd smile on his face that was anything but joyful.

"Hello, Lily," he said, softly.

"Hi Sev," Lily replied, with a forced sort of politeness, "What's up?"

"I just thought I'd check to see if you wanted any extra help with the Potions assignment. It's very complex,"

"I *know* ." She replied, irritated, "But I'm sure I'll manage--"

BANG

Everyone at the table jumped and spun around to stare at the end of the hall, where Mulciber had just let off a firecracker at the far end of the Slytherin table. He was laughing heartily as the whole school looked on, terrified.

"Five points from Slytherin!" McGonagall shouted, marching up the aisle between the tables, "And you'll clean that mess up at once..."

Dinner returned to normal. Snape was still standing there. Lily looked up at him,

"As I said, Remus and I will manage." She said, "I'm not stupid, you know, Severus."

"I never said you were..." Snape looked genuinely upset by this, "I just... oh, never mind." With that, he cast an unpleasant glance at Remus, then swept away, back to his own table.

"Weirdo." Mary muttered.

"Leave him alone." Lily snapped. She looked so fierce that Mary didn't even have a comeback.

"Er... have any of you had any luck with that hinkypunk essay?" Marlene asked quickly, trying to keep the peace. "Mine's crap."

"I'll lend you my notes, if you want," Remus offered, taking a gulp of pumpkin juice. "Once Sirius gives them back..."

Sirius looked up, hearing his name spoken,

"Oh yeah, sorry Moony, hang on, they're in my bag..." He began digging around in the junkyard that was his book bag, pulling out scrunched up balls of parchment, dungbombs, sweets and broken quills.

"How do you find anything in there?" Remus sighed, sipping some more pumpkin juice, "You're the messiest person I've ever met."

Sirius shrugged and winked at him, withdrawing the notes and handing them to Marlene.

"Oooh, Remus," Mary said, "Did I tell you I had another letter from Darren this week?"

Remus groaned,

"Yes." He whined, "And it was just as boring as the last five hundred letters you've made me read."

Sirius snorted. Marlene dropped her fork. Mary looked horrified, and opened and closed her mouth a few times. Remus frowned - why on earth had he said that? Of course, it was true, but it was horribly thoughtless and mean.

"Sorry," he said, looking down. He felt strange. Maybe the James thing was getting to him even more than he thought.

"No, I'm sorry." Mary said, standing up, her lower lip trembling, "I won't bore you anymore, then!" She turned quickly and left the room, her plate of food half eaten.

"Mary!" Marlene got up, running to follow her. Lily looked at Remus,

"Did you mean that?"

"Yes." He said promptly, "Actually I find all of this boyfriend-girlfriend stuff boring, I wish you'd all just leave me alone." Once he'd stopped talking, he blinked, surprised at himself. Why was he saying these things?!

"Remus!" Lily said, looking shocked - though made of sterner stuff than Mary, she didn't leave, "There's nothing wrong with Mary wanting to talk about her boyfriend or... um... or teenagers having crushes, it's normal, isn't it?"

"I don't care if it's normal." He shrugged, "I think you're all acting like idiots. Even you - why on earth would you want to go out with me, when the most popular boy in the school is madly in love with you? He's ten times nicer than me, too, you're just too arrogant to see it."

"Remus!" Lily said again, turning red.

"Well it's true!" He said, helplessly.

"Moony," Sirius said, finally, "Are you ok?"

"I'm fine, still a bit hungry, though. Think Mary will mind if I finish her potatoes?"

"Seriously, Remus," James piped up, unexpectedly, "This isn't like you at all."

"I'm just being honest."

"Yeah, brutally hone-- oh Merlin!" Sirius slapped his forehead, "Evans, did Snape put something in his drink? When the firework went off, maybe?"

"He would never do something like that, it's illegal!"

"Pffft." Remus snorted, mouth full of mashed potato, "As if Snivellus gives a toss! He's been trying to get back at me ever since I hit him on the train."

"You what?!" Lily stared at him,

"Yeah," Remus swallowed, "Nuttled him right in the head, it was great." He knew there was definitely something wrong now, but he couldn't seem to help it. The truth just came spilling out of him.

"Right," Sirius stood up, "Stop talking, Moony, before you say something you'll really regret."

Those words dislodged a memory in Remus's mind,

"Y'know," he grinned, "That's exactly what Snape said on the stairs the other day..."

"SEVERUS!" Lily shouted, at the top of her voice. She got up and stormed over to the Slytherin table, Sirius, James, Remus and Peter in tow. "What have you done to Remus?!" She demanded, stamping her foot angrily on the flagstone floor.

"Why do you ask?" Severus smirked, cruelly,

"You tell me how to fix him right now!"

"There's nothing wrong with him," Severus replied calmly, "Is there, Remus?"

"Nothing really," Remus shrugged, "I do keep saying things I shouldn't, though, like--"

"SHUT UP." Sirius kicked him, hard in the shin, distracting Remus from spilling his guts to Snape. Sirius now rounded on the Slytherin boy, "You bastard, it's *veritaserum*, isn't it?! Truth potion!"

"One way to find out," Severus's smile broadened, "What's your deepest, darkest secret, Lupin?"

Oh god, where to start? Remus thought to himself. He knew he shouldn't say anything. *Mustn't* say anything. He would be in such terrible danger if anyone found out... but he wanted to, he wanted to very badly - he had so many secrets, and they were all swimming to the surface of his mind, like lifebuoys.

I'm a werewolf. I'm planning to hunt down and murder Fenrir Greyback. I spent the whole summer stealing and drinking and fighting. I can't read properly without help. I'm secretly running an illegal trade in muggle cigarettes. I don't fancy girls at all, not any of them. I don't think I ever will. He opened his mouth,

"Well, I'm a---"

"SILENCIO!" Sirius shouted, suddenly, aiming his wand at Remus, while James tackled him to the floor, clamping a hand over his mouth.

Everyone on the Slytherin table burst out laughing as James and Remus struggled together on the floor, Lily watching them, completely nonplussed. Remus's mouth kept moving, desperate to

divulge every one of his secrets, until he was completely free of them - but not a sound escaped his lips. Sirius was excellent at silencing charms.

Together, Peter, Sirius and James hoisted Remus to his feet, and dragged him bodily from the dining hall, amid a flurry of laughter and jeers from the Slytherins. Only once they were all upstairs and shut inside their dorm room did Sirius lift the charm, allowing Remus to speak. By then, fortunately, the urge to tell everyone everything had passed.

“Sorry, Remus,” Sirius said, “But I had to do it, you were going to--”

“I know.” Remus hung his head, sitting on his bed, “Bloody Snape! How long does it take to wear off?”

“Depends on how much you took, I think.” James said, flicking through his potions book, “Godric, how did he do it?! That’s NEWT level stuff, truth serum!”

“He’s the best in the year at Potions,” Remus supplied, unwillingly, “Lily said he’s already doing seventh year essays, just for fun.”

“What a boring old swot.” Sirius snorted, joining James in searching through the book, “Try not to say anything, Moony, ok?”

“I can’t help it.” Remus said, without meaning to.

“Ok, right, it says here you should be clear within twenty four hours, so... dinner time tomorrow, at the very latest.”

“What about lessons?!”

“We’ll say you’re sick. You can’t risk it, Moony! I could *kill* Snape, that filthy, dirty, underhanded...”

“I’m not missing any lessons for him.” Remus folded his arms, “There must be an antidote.”

“We could go and ask Slughorn?” James said, finally.

“Yeah, good idea, I think he’s still in the Great Hall,” Sirius nodded. He turned to Remus, and spoke very clearly and slowly, as if he was talking to a child, “Remus. Stay. Here.”

“Bugger off,” Remus turned away, pouting like a little boy.

“I’ll stay with him.” James said. “You two go.”

Sirius needed no more than that, and he was bounding down the stairs, calling back,

“Hang in there Moony! If I see a Slytherin on my way down, then I’ll...”

But they couldn’t hear the rest; Sirius had gone, and Peter with him. There was a long, awkward silence. Remus didn’t trust himself to speak. Finally, James did.

“Sorry I’ve been a bit of a prat, lately.”

Remus was taken aback, and shook his head fiercely,

“You haven’t been! I just wish I could prove to you that I... wait! Ask me!”

“Eh?”

“Ask me now, while I’m under a truth serum; ask me how I feel about Lily. You’ll know it’s the truth.”

“Remus, I don’t want to,” James frowned. It didn’t mesh with his idea of good sportsmanship.

“Go on,” Remus encouraged, “I really don’t mind - it’s between you and me, right?” He got up and grabbed James by the shoulders, meeting his eyes with confidence, “Ask me.”

“Er... ok then. Remus, do you fancy Lily Evans?”

“No. Absolutely not.” Remus didn’t so much as blink.

“Ok, good... What about Marlene?”

“Nope. Never have, never will. They’re my friends, like you are.”

James looked at him very intently, then his face broke into a genuine smile. He slapped Remus on the back.

“Thanks, Moony, you’re a real mate.”

Remus laughed,

“Any time.”

* * *

Fortunately for Remus, Slughorn was able to provide an antidote almost immediately - though the marauders’ code of honour prevented them from telling him who had laced Remus’s drink in the first place.

“It’s better this way,” Remus assured them, “It’ll make him really nervous if he doesn’t get in trouble straight away - he’ll wonder how we’re going to get him back.”

“How *are* we going to get him back?” Sirius asked, eagerly, over breakfast on the morning of the Slytherin v Gryffindor game, “He nearly outed you, Moony, we have to teach him a lesson!”

“Let me think about it.” Remus replied. “Just thrash Slytherin at quidditch for me, first.”

“Easy,” Sirius winked. Remus grinned back. It was hard not to grin at Sirius when he was in such a good mood - resplendent in his scarlet and gold quidditch robes, hair pulled off his face, eyes sharp and full of determination. It was the best version of Sirius, and Remus’s heart pounded with pride and adrenaline.

The tension was palpable in the quidditch stands before the players had even appeared on the pitch. Two quarters of the stadium was covered in red, jeering and booing at the green section. Quidditch had become a way for the students of Hogwarts to truly show their emotions about the war - and it was extremely ugly.

“Tensions are high in this year’s semi-final,” the commentator, Tracey Darcy, spoke through her magical megaphone, “This match will of course determine which team goes through to the final against Ravenclaw, and by the looks of the players, it’ll be a close one... On Gryffindor we have Potter, of course, a legend in his own right with more than two hundred goals under his belt already... Marlene McKinnon there, a formidable beater - and so she should be, her brother Danny

McKinnon of course plays professionally for the Chudley Cannons... and there's Sirius Black, Gryffindor's second beater, in his second game of the year... Black has already shown himself to be as competent as McKinnon, and I'm sure all the ladies will agree, doesn't look half bad in his kit..."

"Ahem." McGonagall's disapproving cough could be heard over the megaphone. Remus noticed that almost every girl in the crowd was either giggling, or screaming Sirius's name.

"Sorry, professor..." Tracey continued, "...and here comes Slytherin," (deafening booing from the crowd, here), "They have their very own Black on the team, of course, Sirius's younger brother, Regulus - seeker... and Mulciber, taken on as beater this term..."

The boos grew so loud now that Remus could barely hear Darcy over the noise. Peter wasn't helping, and kept jumping up and down in his seat. Remus was staying seated as long as he could - his hip was causing him problems again, and he didn't want to exacerbate it. 'Limp Lupin' was worse than 'Loony Lupin', somehow.

Finally the game began, and the both teams shot into the air with incredible force. If the crowd was mean, the players were even worse - with the weight of their houses on their shoulders it felt like a matter of life or death. Remus had never seen James play so hard; rocketing up and down the pitch like a red bullet, catching and throwing the quaffle faster than the Slytherin keeper could keep track of.

Sirius and Marlene were equally fearsome, both working as much more of a team than they had last time, clearly communicating and watching the backs of their fellow teammates. And they really needed to - Slytherin was playing dirty. Twice Sirius had to fend off a bludger that had 'accidentally' flown right into James's path, while Marlene became the Gryffindor seeker's shadow, protecting him from some very nasty near-misses.

Remus was so busy watching his three friends - wincing when they came close to danger; cheering their victories - that he had quite forgotten the aim of the game. So had everyone else, it seemed, except for Regulus Black, who flew high above the pitch, and then around the outskirts, showing that infamous Slytherin cunning as he sought out the snitch.

No one was watching as Regulus Black, the smallest Slytherin team member, caught sight of the tiny golden ball and began to soar down towards it from his incredible height. No one was watching Regulus Black, because they were all watching Sirius swing his bat at a bludger that would have easily knocked him off his broom. He hit it back so hard that it shot straight back towards Mulciber's face. Mulciber, though stupid, was not slow, and swooped down immediately, ducking out of the way - just as Regulus passed behind him.

Now Remus saw him - now everybody did, and a terrible shriek went up as the bludger connected with Regulus's head and knocked him from his broom.

They watched in such horror that all house prejudice was forgotten, as the limp body of Regulus Black plummeted to the ground.

Fourth Year: February (Part Two)

Chapter Notes

Warning for really unpleasant parent/child interaction.

NOTE: Yes, I know, I have been spelling Walpurga with a 'P' instead of a 'B'. That's how it will have to stay.

Remus almost missed what happened, because everyone in the crowd immediately stood up, jostling to see the disaster unfold - fortunately, when Remus stood up he was a good deal taller than those around him.

Sirius tried - no one could deny that. The moment he saw the bludger hit Regulus, he bent flat on his broom and shot forward as if the devil was at his heels, faster than Remus had ever seen anyone - even James - fly. In fact, Sirius gathered such a speed, and at such a terrifying vertical angle, that Remus felt sure he was going to crash to the ground too, and his stomach lurched with fear. Sirius was too late, but Madam Hooch was not.

She stood on the grass, wand raised, and managed to slow Regulus's descent, so that his body appeared to be falling through water, not air. By the time Sirius hit the ground, dropping his broom and pelting towards his brother, Regulus was lying so peacefully he could have been sleeping.

Sirius was on his knees, the rest of the team were landing around him, McGonagall was shouting something over the megaphone and a crowd quickly surrounded the two Black brothers, so that no one could see anything. Remus began to hobble down the wooden steps as quickly as his wonky hip would allow. Peter scurried along behind him,

"Where are you going?" He panted,

"Sirius." Was all Remus could think to say.

But once they reached ground level they couldn't get onto the pitch; the heads of houses were shepherding students back into the castle, and wouldn't let them past.

"They'll have taken Regulus to the hospital wing," Peter said, "Maybe Sirius is in the changing rooms?"

"No," Remus shook his head, "No, he'd want to go with Reg... he probably thinks it's all his fault."

"Well," Peter looked up at him, "He did hit the bludger, didn't he?"

Remus clenched his fists and fought the urge to hit Peter.

"I'm going to the hospital wing, then." He turned and began to stride awkwardly towards the castle, trying to get ahead of everyone else.

"What about James?" Peter had to jog to keep up.

“He’ll be there too.” Remus replied.

And of course he was. When Peter and Remus arrived outside the hospital wing, having battled their way through the throngs of gossiping students, they found James sitting on the floor outside, elbows resting on his knees, staring into space. He was still in his quidditch robes, his cheeks were still flushed from flying, and his hair was a mess.

“Is he ok?!” Remus asked, at once - and he wasn’t sure who he meant.

“Yeah, think so,” James looked up at them in dazed surprise, “Knocked out cold, though. Pomfrey wont let me in.”

“Sirius?”

“Yeah, he’s in there. Thought I’d better wait... Slughorn’s contacting their parents, so.” He shrugged. “Thought I’d better be here.”

“We’re all here.” Remus said, firmly, sitting down next to James with some difficulty. His hip was really sore, now; the pain shot all the way down from pelvis to ankle. Peter eventually squatted down too, and they waited.

“Did you see what happened?” James asked, finally. “I was on the other end of the pitch, I didn’t...”

“A bludger,” Remus said, “Mulciber hit one right at Sirius, it had to be a foul. Sirius hit it back at him, but Mulciber got out of the way, and Regulus was right behind him. Sirius can’t have seen him; it was an accident. It was... it was horrible.”

“Shit.” James said.

They were quiet for a bit longer. It was starting to grow dark, and the candles in the sconces along the wall opposite began to light themselves. Remus wondered what James and Peter were thinking. Were they more worried about Sirius than Regulus, like he was? He felt a bit guilty - but Madam Pomfrey had been putting him back together since he was eleven years old, and he didn’t think that a bludger to the head was beyond her abilities. What concerned him more was the state Sirius would be in. He had thrown hexes at Regulus a hundred times, but he had never, ever, hurt his little brother intentionally. This hadn’t been intentional either, but Remus knew in his gut that Sirius wouldn’t see it that way.

They were disturbed from their thoughts by the quick clacking of high heels on flagstones, and Professor McGonagall’s worried voice coming around the corner,

“Please, Walpurga, he couldn’t be in safer hands with Madam Pomfrey - it’s really best that he isn’t moved--”

“I think *I* shall be making the decisions here, Minerva.” That cold, low voice replied.

James and Peter leapt up, nervously, and James bent to help Remus to his feet. None of them had seen Sirius’s mother since that awful Christmas two years ago, and their terror of her was still fresh. McGonagall and Mrs Black came marching around the corner; Walpurga in her thick black travelling cloak and sharp high heeled boots. She had that same look of cruel superiority Remus remembered, but her forehead was creased, too, and her hair wasn’t as neat as usual.

She was accompanied by a small, elderly wizard with a long trailing beard, carrying a heavy looking dragonskin case. Walpurga glanced at the three boys waiting outside the hospital wing and

Remus held his breath - but she didn't seem to think it worth her time, and strode past, pushing the wooden doors open with both hands and marching inside.

Remus, James and Peter peered in from the hallway to watch the scene unfold. McGonagall and the bearded wizard hurried in after Mrs Black.

Regulus was lying in a bed, and from what they could tell was still unconscious - or maybe just sleeping. With his eyes closed, and at a distance, he looked remarkably like Sirius, which made Remus's stomach lurch again. But Sirius was sitting beside him, wide awake in his red Gryffindor robes, one foot propped up on a stool. He looked very pale, and much smaller than usual; his eyes were red. He seemed to shrink even further as his mother approached, swooping towards her sons like some terrible vampire bat.

Madam Pomfrey stepped in, just then,

"He's quite all right, just a heavy knock," she said, reassuringly, "I've given him a healing draught and mended the fractures."

"Fractures?" Walpurga said, sharply. She stood at the end of Regulus's bed, looking down at him. She didn't try to reach out for him, or Sirius, but stood still as a statue.

"Very minor, and completely healed now." Madam Pomfrey said, "He'll be up and about by tomorrow morning. Now, Sirius has--"

"This is our family physician," Walpurga interrupted, extending a hand to introduce the wizened old man beside her, "He will be taking over my son's care. I'm taking him home as soon as he has been thoroughly examined."

"I'm telling you, everything that can be done has been done." Madam Pomfrey said, sounding rather angry now.

Walpurga looked down at her imperiously,

"Within your competence, I am sure. But he is my son and I will care for him as I see fit."

Madam Pomfrey turned red in the face, and appeared to be quite speechless, so that McGonagall had to lean over and whisper something in her ear to mollify her. The old bearded wizard placed his case on the bedside table and opened it, before silently bending over Regulus.

Meanwhile, Walpurga had turned her attention to her elder son. She did not move from the end of the bed, but her hawkish glare was enough to hold Sirius in place.

"You." She said. "And what are you doing here?"

Sirius said something, but it came out barely above a whisper. Walpurga frowned,

"What?" She barked, "Speak up, boy!"

"He's my brother." Sirius said, louder now, though his voice was hoarse and cracked slightly. Mrs Black tutted.

"For goodness' sake, have you *been* crying?! Try to show at least a modicum of decorum. *Toujours Pur*, Sirius! Try to remember your duty."

Sirius did not reply, but bowed his head, his hair falling in front of his face. Remus hoped for his

sake that he hadn't begun to cry again. Walpurga continued, "You may leave, Sirius. Your father and I will see you in June."

With that, she turned back to Regulus, and did not acknowledge Sirius again. James started forward, unable to watch any longer, but Remus held back with Peter. It didn't feel like his place, somehow; he didn't have the right. And though Remus wished more than anything he knew what to do, James was always so much better with Sirius.

McGonagall had apparently seen James, and acted quickly, placing a hand on Sirius's shoulder and gently guiding in out of his chair and towards the doorway. He was limping, slightly. Madam Pomfrey joined them halfway, and handed Sirius a draught too.

"Straight up to bed and drink every drop, you hear me? You shouldn't be in too much pain, but it'll be uncomfortable tonight."

Sirius nodded, wearily, not speaking. James clapped him on the shoulder and squeezed, then nodded to McGonagall. She looked like she very much wanted to say something, but held her tongue, only glancing back at Regulus and Mrs Black. She would keep an eye on the situation, Remus was sure. She would let Sirius know if anything happened.

The four marauders walked most of the way to Gryffindor tower together in dead silence until they came to a dual staircase, and Peter suddenly said,

"We've missed dinner."

James and Remus glared at him, and he looked very hurt. "What I *meant*," he squeaked, angrily, "Was that I'll go down to the kitchens now and get them to send something up. If that's ok with you two?!"

"Nice one, Pete." James said, apologetically.

Remus just ducked his head, looking away. Peter turned tail and headed downstairs, while the other three kept going upwards. It was slow progress considering two of them had pronounced limps.

"Right state we must look." Sirius muttered, humourlessly, as they paused on one of the landings for a breather.

"What's wrong with you, anyway?" Remus finally asked, rubbing his aching hip.

"Broke my ankle," Sirius said, "Landed too hard on it."

James winced. Sirius shrugged, "Can't feel it, just a bit wobbly."

When they finally reached their bedroom, Sirius locked himself inside the bathroom to shower and change. Peter shortly reappeared, laden with sandwiches, fruit, chocolate, cakes and everything else he could carry.

"Bunch of girls down there want to see Sirius," he huffed, dumping everything onto his bed, "There's a gang of second years all making him get well cards - told 'em to bugger off."

"Thanks Pete," James said, "You're a good mate."

Peter smiled, finally. He nodded at the closed bathroom door.

"He ok?"

“He will be.” James sighed, stripping off his quidditch robes, leaving them in a pile on the floor. In just his vest and underwear, he grabbed a chicken sandwich from Peter’s bed and bit into it hungrily. Remus and Peter took this as permission and followed suit.

Sirius was in the bathroom for a long time, and they thought it best to leave him to it. James changed into his usual clothes and began tidying Sirius’s eternally messy bed. Remus helped, collecting up the scattered books and half finished essays. He would finish them, Remus decided, he would do all of Sirius’s homework for the entire week, if it helped at all.

“I fucking hate his family.” James said, suddenly, as he shook out one of Sirius’s pillows.

“His mum’s even worse than mine,” Peter sniffed. Remus began to sort through Sirius’s notes, smoothing out the parchments and trying to make sense of what was due when.

The bathroom door clicked, and Sirius emerged in his pyjamas, his hair wet and combed back.

“You hungry, mate?” Peter asked, nervously, offering a plate of sandwiches. Sirius shook his head and walked towards his bed.

“Just gonna go to sleep.” He murmured, pulling the curtains across.

“Sirius!” Remus burst out, before he completely disappeared from view. Sirius stopped, staring at him through the gap in the hanging. Remus chewed his lip, “It wasn’t your fault.” He said. “I was watching; it was an accident. You were both just so focussed on the game, that’s all.”

Sirius looked at him, his face soft after the shower, his eyes tired and dark. He smiled gently and shrugged.

“Still did it.” Then drew the curtains tight shut.

* * *

The quidditch game was declared incomplete, and both teams agreed to a re-match once the Slytherins had found another seeker. The next morning at breakfast, the Slytherin captain received a howler from Walpurga Black, accusing him of putting her son in danger. Regulus was not present, and rumours abounded, but McGonagall had privately told Sirius that all was well - Mrs Black simply wished to keep Regulus at home for a further week as a precaution.

Sirius carried on about his day, but the light in him had dimmed. He didn’t hex anyone, make jokes, or even talk out of turn in his lessons. He simply pushed through, as if sleepwalking. Remus was starting to wonder whether it was still the shock of the accident, or the anxiety of having to face his mother inside Hogwarts.

That night was the full moon, so Remus could be of little help to Sirius. Actually, he was a little bit glad to have the excuse to get away from the dorm room, which had become a dismal, quiet place while Sirius was in his mood. Remus wasn’t the only one - Peter kept slipping away to visit Desdemona.

Perhaps it was all of the quiet, all of the unsaid things and unresolved tension, but February’s moon was a bad one. Remus awoke with his throat burnt raw from howling, splinters under his fingernails and bruises all over.

Lately he’d noticed that the older he got, the more he was able to remember after the transformations. It still wasn’t very clear; like remembering a dream; images and feelings swimming in and out of sight, but this time Remus thought that maybe the wolf had wanted

something - maybe it had wanted to get out more than usual.

He lay in the hospital bed trying to remember, feverish and headachy, too uncomfortable to sleep, sheets twisted around his ankles like manacles.

“Morning, Moony,” A soft, sad voice spoke to him. He had to rub his eyes and blink a few times before he even realised it was Sirius.

“M-mornin’,” he slurred, groggy from whatever painkiller he’d been supplied. It always made his accent slip, which he hated. “What’chu doin’ ‘ere?”

Sirius sat on the end of the bed and stuck out his foot,

“Check up on my ankle. It’s fine now.”

“Oh, good.” Remus nodded, trying to pull himself up into a sitting position, and failing miserably.

“How was it?” Sirius asked, gesturing broadly at Remus’s body.

“Fine,” Remus replied, “Normal. James ‘ere too?”

“Nah,” Sirius looked down at his shoes, “Giving him a break from me.”

“I don’t think he minds..”

“I do, though.”

Remus nodded. He didn’t like being fussed over either.

“Moony?”

“Yeah?”

“You know how you said it wasn’t my fault?”

“It *wasn’t* your fault.” Remus said, firmly. A little bit too firmly, he felt the muscles in his throat strain and contract and he began to cough. Sirius hopped off the bed and grabbed the glass of water from the nightstand, handing it to Remus. Remus gulped it down, embarrassed, spilling a bit down his front.

“I didn’t hit him on purpose, you’re right,” Sirius said, looking out of the window over Remus’s head, squinting slightly as if he was looking for something out there. “But... when I saw him fall like that, I thought... I thought - *don’t let him die* .”

“Well, of course,” Remus frowned. He wished Sirius would meet his eye. “He’s your brother, of course you didn’t want him to--”

“I wasn’t thinking about him, though.” Sirius said, “I was thinking about me. I was thinking... if he dies, then I’ll be the only one left, and my parents will... I wouldn’t have any way out. I *need* Regulus to stay alive. I need him to be the perfect son, so it doesn’t matter that I’m the bad son. That’s what I was thinking. I’m a coward.”

Remus didn’t know what to say, but he had to say something.

“You’d still have been sorry if he died, though. Not just because of that.”

“Yeah, but my first thought--”

“People don’t think properly when they’re scared. Believe me.” Remus said, hoping he sounded authoritative. “I saw you, you risked your life to try and save him - that’s not cowardly. Broke your stupid ankle like the idiotic hard-headed Gryffindor you are.”

Sirius exhaled, a strained little laugh. He looked at his feet again, then at Remus. Remus smiled at him, encouragingly, even though his jaw ached.

“Reg gonna be ok?”

“Yeah, fine. Owled me this morning - being waited on hand and foot, sounds like. Mother tried to get me kicked off the team, too, but he stopped her.”

“There you go, then.” Remus smirked, “You’re still the bad son.”

Sirius laughed.

Fourth Year: March

Chapter Summary

CW for underage drinking and smoking.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Didn't know what time it was

the lights were low-oh-oh

I leaned back on my radio-oh-oh

Some cat was laying down some rock n roll, lotta soul he said

Then the loud sound did seem to fade (ah ade),

Came back like a slow voice on a wave of phase (ah aze);

That weren't no DJ, that was hazy cosmic jive...

Saturday 8th March 1975

Considering the events of the spring term, Remus was not expecting much of a celebration as his fifteenth birthday approached. Of course, the marauders were as pleased as ever to prove him wrong.

As usual, everything was planned with extreme secrecy, and Remus was completely unaware until the very last moment. It was the saturday before his birthday, and he had been lounging on his bed reading, with one of Sirius's records playing low in the background. He often borrowed the record player and camped out in his bed these days - Sirius never seemed to mind.

It was only about nine o'clock, but he was alone, and considering an early night. Just as he had made his mind up to get into his pyjamas, Sirius burst into the room with a wicked grin on his face that could only mean one thing - it was going to be a long night.

"Ready?!" He said, bounding across the floor, bringing in the smell of woodsmoke from the common room fireplace.

"For what?" Remus asked calmly, marking his place and setting his book aside.

"For your birthday surprise, *obviously*," Sirius sighed, as if Remus was being very slow. "C'mon, up you get, shoes on please - wear those mad muggle boots you've got, with the crazy laces."

"Er... where are we going?"

"Out." Sirius began digging around in his trunk. He withdrew a pair of muggle jeans and a plain black t-shirt.

“Oh, you mean *out out*?” Remus raised an eyebrow, as Sirius began to undress.

“Yeah, take your cloak.”

Sirius looked good in muggle clothes, Remus thought to himself. Really, most people looked better in a t-shirt and jeans than they did in a school uniform or seventeenth century robes - but Sirius wore everything well. Remus asked no further questions as he laced up his boots. It was clear that Sirius was enjoying the surprise, and he saw no reason to spoil it.

He was led down the stairs, feeling very odd in jeans and a travelling cloak, but still not complaining - Sirius probably thought they looked the height of muggle fashion. In the common room they were met by James and Peter, also grinning mischievously.

“You know my birthday isn’t for two days, yet.” Remus said, a small smile of his own playing on his lips.

“Tonight’s events are time sensitive.” Sirius replied, briskly. He was trying to retain an aloof air of mystery, but was clearly bursting to tell Remus everything.

“And don’t worry,” James said, eyes twinkling as he held back the portrait door to exit the common room; “We won’t forget to sing for you on Monday at breakfast.”

“And lunch,” Peter added,

“And dinner.” Sirius finished, now they were winding their way down the Gryffindor Tower staircase.

“Under you go, lads.” James said, throwing the heavy invisibility cloak over all four of them. As long as they all stayed very close together, and Remus hunched over, they *just* about fit. It wouldn’t stand another growth spurt from any of them, though.

Fortunately, they did not have to shuffle too far - as Remus had expected, they headed for the statue of the humpbacked witch and slipped behind it, into the tunnel which led to Honeyduke’s.

“So, fifteen!” Sirius said cheerily as they walked, clapping Remus on the shoulder in what he must have considered a very manly sort of way. “Excited?”

Remus shrugged,

“I never really thought about it. You tell me, you’re the oldest.”

“Well, obviously I’m much wiser and more mature than the rest of you...”

James snorted, walking ahead with his wand lit. Sirius ignored him, “I’d rather be seventeen though. Then we could apparate, at least.”

“Oh, don’t start,” Peter huffed, bringing up the rear, “He actually wanted to try and learn to apparate, Remus, just for your birthday, so we could get into Hogsmeade easier.”

“Can’t apparate inside Hogwarts.” Remus said.

“Ten points to Moony.” Sirius grinned, “We could have apparated out of the cellar, though. Save us having to try and get past ol’ Honeyduke.”

“Apparition is really hard though, isn’t it?” Remus asked. He secretly wasn’t sure if he’d be able to do it at all - even doing a side-along with Mr Potter that once had been exhausting and made him

feel sick.

“Yeah, but *we* could do it.” Sirius replied, confidently.

“It was a bit much on top of everything else we’ve had to do this term, though,” Peter said.

Sirius gave the smaller boy a very annoyed look, and Peter’s mouth dropped open, as if he’d said something very wrong.

“You mean with exams coming up?” Remus asked, innocently, to save Peter. He was amazed Pettigrew had managed to keep quiet for so long as it was - though it wasn’t as if James and Sirius were half as discreet as they thought they were.

“Yeah, exactly.” Peter sounded relieved, “Exams. I’m definitely going to fail History of Magic this year. Definitely. I’ll never get an OWL in it.”

They talked about next year’s OWLs for a bit longer, bemoaning their own unpreparedness in this subject or that - though Remus was actually quite looking forward to them, especially the practical exams. Finally they reached the Honeyduke’s cellar. And this was where the plan somewhat fell apart.

“Bugger.” James said, as he tried the locked door. “He’s usually still up doing his accounts or whatever. Must have gone to bed early.”

“Or he could be out,” Remus suggested. “It’s a saturday night.”

“What are we going to do??” Peter asked, “*Alohomora* ? Oh, but we can’t do magic...”

“Let me see,” Remus stepped forward, fiddling in his back pocket for the hairpin he’d had since the summer. “Easy,” he said, inspecting the lock. He bent over it and inserted the pin, stroking it slowly upwards and listening carefully. The satisfying click told him it had worked, and he stepped back, opening the door with a flourish. “Ta-da!”

“You beauty!” James cheered, “C’mon, let’s go!”

Once inside the shop, it was even easier, as that lock worked from the inside. Then, all of a sudden they were outside on Hogsmeade high street in the cold night air. It was deliciously thrilling, being somewhere they shouldn’t - Remus didn’t even care if they got away with it or not. He followed Sirius and James up the cobbled street, past the Three Broomsticks, the closed shops and post office.

The two excitable boys stopped abruptly outside another pub; one Remus hadn’t been to before. The sign swinging above the entrance said *The Hogs Head*, with an appropriately gory image beneath. There was an A-frame chalkboard on the pavement outside which read: *Live Music Tonight! Open Mic, Muggle Tribute Acts!*

“Oh my god!!!” Remus exclaimed - this was absolutely the last thing he had expected. Now he knew why Sirius was grinning so broadly his cheeks must hurt.

“What d’you think??” The dark haired boy asked, eagerly.

“Sirius promised us you’d love it,” James said, sounding less sure. Remus just stared at the chalkboard, then at Sirius,

“I love it.” He confirmed.

Inside, it was neither very busy nor too quiet, and looked as though the first act was just setting up. It wasn't as nice as the three Broomsticks; there was straw on the floor rather than a carpet, and it smelled faintly of a farmyard, but Remus could see that they definitely weren't going to bump into anyone they knew - and no one was going to grass on them to the school.

"I'll get the first round in," Sirius said, merrily, mischief still twinkling in his eyes.

"Sirius..." James said, sternly, "Butterbeers, yeah?"

"Mmm..."

"So," Remus said, as they settled themselves around a small, rickety table which was close enough to the band, but also in a gloomy corner just in case, "Muggle tribute acts? Is that a normal thing for wizards to listen to?"

"Nah," James shook his head, looking just as baffled. "There's been a bit of a trend for it lately. Defying the dark lord and all his pureblood shite, that sort of thing."

"Are they going to play David Bowie?" Peter asked. Poor Peter had the impression that muggle music began and ended with David Bowie, thanks to Sirius and Remus.

The band announced themselves as *Banshee Blues* just as Sirius returned with a tray of drinks. About fifteen of them.

"Sirius!" James raised his eyebrows,

"What?!" Sirius winked at him, "I got you your butterbeer!"

"I meant *just* butterbeer, for all of us. How did you even get served? Is that firewhisky?"

"And mead." Sirius nodded. "Don't drink any if you don't want it. Here," He picked up a glass with about two inches of golden brown coloured liquid in it, raising it, "To our beloved Moony - inventor of the marauders map, architect of our greatest pranks, completer of our overdue homework..."

"To Moony," The other two smirked. Remus looked at the band, too embarrassed to respond.

He had never seen live music performed before, let alone live music performed by wizards. Their clothes were predictably odd - a mix of traditional robes and assorted muggle garments - the lead singer wore a white stetson, for some reason, paired with a pink feather boa. The instruments looked muggleish enough, but they had no amplifiers - apparently magic took care of the volume.

They played a few Beatles songs, then some Rolling Stones, and Remus thought they were pretty good. Even James was tapping his foot along by the end, though that might have been due to Sirius sneaking measures of firewhisky into his butterbeer. Firewhisky was pretty foul, Remus thought, but no worse than the cheap vodka he'd been knocking back last summer. He proudly swallowed his first glass in one, without wincing, and Sirius stared at him in awe.

Peter stuck to mead, and kept asking, "am I drunk yet? am I drunk?" after every sip. After two flagons, he probably was.

"Maybe we should just stick to butterbeer now..." Remus said, eyeing Peter with concern. He was swaying on his stool slightly, pink cheeked and grinning. Banshee Blues were packing away their instruments, and a pale faced young woman with a drippy fringe approached the mic stand.

“That you, Lupin?” A young wizard approached them from the bar. Remus vaguely recognised him, but wasn’t sure where from.

“Er... hi.” He said, nervously.

“Arnold Doyle! I was at Hogwarts last year, remember?” He was tall and lanky, but so were half the boys at school. “Your fags got me through my NEWTs!”

“Oh! Right, yeah, hi Arnold, sorry.” He still wasn’t sure he remembered him, but the whisky had made him feel friendly and warm towards everyone. “What you doin’ ‘ere?”

“Girlfriend’s playing,” he nodded up at the stage, where the drippy looking girl was tuning her acoustic guitar. “What about you? Thought you were still at school?”

“S’m my birthday,” Remus grinned, “Snuck out, innit.”

Arnold laughed,

“Gotcha. Well, I won’t dob you in. Can I buy you a drink? Say thanks for the cigs?”

“You’re our kind of man, Arnold,” Sirius called out, more loudly than he needed to in such a small pub, but he’d been matching Remus drink for drink.

Arnold just laughed and went back to the bar. His girlfriend started playing - a Bob Dylan song, it sounded like, but Remus wasn’t that familiar with folk. He still couldn’t remember ever having sold Arnold anything, but Arnold clearly felt a debt was owed, because he bought Remus an entire bottle of firewhisky and set it down on the table.

“Happy birthday! Come of age, have you?”

“Actually--” Peter started, then stopped as Sirius kicked him hard under the table.

“Yeah,” Remus replied smoothly, “Cheers!”

After that, things went a bit wobbly, but he definitely decided smoking was a good idea - and Sirius, keen not to be outdone, agreed.

“Those things stink, Moony.” James complained, pulling a face. “And what does he mean your fags got him through his NEWTs?”

“He must have confused me with someone,” Remus shrugged. Sirius burst into hysterical giggling.

The next band, in Remus’s opinion, was the best - they were called *Dragonhide* and played a lot of Slade, Status Quo and Black Sabbath. It made Remus want to get up and dance, but he wasn’t as drunk as Sirius or Peter, and had not completely lost his inhibitions. He couldn’t help singing along towards the end, though - as almost everyone in the pub was, by this point. It seemed somehow like such a good idea to get up on his chair, waving his glass above his head as the whole pub roared;

“So cum on feel the noize!”

Girls grab ya boys!

We get wild, wild, wild!

We get wild, wild, wild!”

Sirius of course thought this was great fun, and after two attempts to climb up onto his own stool (quickly caught by James, who was in better command of his faculties), ended up with his arms slung around Peter and James, swinging this way and that, singing at the top of his voice;

“So you think we have a lazy time, well you should know better...”

And I don't know whyyyyyy

I just don't know whyyyyyy

And you say I got a dirty mind, well I'm a mean go getter!

And I don't know whyyyyy

And I don't know whyyyyyyyy

Anymore! Oh no--ooooh!”

In fact, the marauders were all so taken by this hook that they were still singing it as loudly as they could as they staggered back through Hogsmeade to the high street, arm in arm, tripping and laughing as they went. Out in the cold air, Remus felt a bit sharper, and slightly guilty as he realised what a state Sirius and Peter were in.

By the time they got to Honeyduke's, it must have been well past midnight. The snuck inside as quietly as possible and headed for the cellar - James and Remus desperately trying to herd Sirius and Peter away from all of the sweets on display. The walk back through the tunnel to Hogwarts was pretty dreadful. Peter could barely keep his eyes open and staggered against James, complaining he had a headache. Sirius bounced from wall to wall, seemingly only held upright by his own forward momentum, occasionally bursting into snatches of song.

At end of the tunnel, James and Remus were very much sober, Peter was barely conscious, and Sirius was looking worryingly green.

“Merlin, how are we going to get them back to bed without waking up the whole castle?!” James huffed, still supporting Peter. Sirius promptly leaned over and threw up.

“Christ,” Remus grabbed his shoulders, as he was in danger of toppling forward into the pool of sick. He pulled Sirius's hair back, quickly, and patted his friend on the back. “Errr...” he looked at James, “Why don't you take Peter with the cloak, it'll be easier. I'll wait a bit with him,” he jerked his head at Sirius, “Then summon the cloak in half an hour or so? Easier with two, anyway.”

“Good plan.” James said, gratefully. “You sure you don't want me to watch him?”

Sirius sat down on the ground, very suddenly, head in his hands and groaning.

“Nah, I've looked after pissheads before,” Remus smirked. “You go. Cheers for the birthday, James, it was bloody brilliant.”

James flashed him a smile before disappearing under the invisibility cloak with Peter still clinging on for dear life. Remus sighed and sat himself down next to Sirius. He pointed his wand at the mess opposite,

“Scourgify.” And it was clean.

Sirius groaned again, and rested his head on Remus's shoulder. Remus chuckled, softly, “Alright

there, mate?”

“Urgh.”

“Yeah, sounds about right. Hey, don’t puke on me, ok?”

“Mmmph.”

“Thirsty?”

“Yuh.”

Remus drank the last of his bottle of firewhisky, then touched his wand to the opening,

“*Aguamente* !” and it filled with crystal clear cold water. He handed it to Sirius, “Don’t drink it too fast, or you will puke.”

“Mmm.” Sirius sipped it a bit, eyes still closed. His face was a bit pale and clammy, but he still looked ten times better than Remus probably did. “You’re so good at stuff, Moony.” He slurred, leaning heavily on Remus’s shoulder.

“Yeah,” Remus grunted, “Picking locks and holding my drink.”

“And magic.” Sirius murmured, sleepily.

“Yeah, we’re wizards, idiot.”

“I’m good at magic,” Sirius sighed, “But you, like... *are* , magic, y’know?”

“You’re drunk and talking bollocks.” Remus laughed. “Oi, don’t fall asleep, I’ve got to get you back.”

“Shuddup.” Sirius replied, nodding off.

Remus sighed, and wondered if anyone would notice if they just stayed put.

Chapter End Notes

Songs at the beginning is Starman, by David Bowie.
Cum on Feel the Noize is by Slade.

Fourth Year: April

Saturday 26th April 1975

“Remus Lupin, put that book down at once!” Madam Pomfrey’s shrill, tired voice echoed across the infirmary floor. Remus dropped the heavy textbook, looking up, startled.

“Can you see through the screen?!” He called back. He had thought he was practically alone.

“No,” she replied, “I just know you too well.” She appeared, stepping around the pale green hospital screens. It was lighter, beyond them – Pomfrey had cast a spell which created a capsule of darkness around Remus’s bed. So that he could get some sleep, she said.

She snatched the book up, now, giving him a stern look. “I had hoped you’d be resting your eyes, not straining them.”

“I can see in the dark,” he shrugged. It was true – no matter how much punishment his body took, his eyes remained perfect, better than perfect, even.

“No excuse.” Madam Pomfrey tutted. “As you’re up, I suppose you’re ready for visitors?”

“Yeah, of course!” He sat up, eagerly, straightening his night shirt.

“Come on, then,” she called to James, Sirius and Peter, who appeared single-file from behind the screen. “Not too much noise, and no books!”

“Why can’t you have books?” James asked, leaning over the end of the bed frame.

“Because it’s *Moony*,” Sirius said, flinging himself bodily across the small single bed, right over Remus’s legs. “He doesn’t understand moderation.”

“I just want to revise,” Remus sighed, rubbing the back of his head, “I mean, I’m *at school*, it’s what I’m *supposed* to do.” He accepted a chocolate frog from Peter, who was handing them out.

“You don’t want to burn out though,” Sirius said, his own mouth full of chocolate, “You’re miles ahead of the rest of the class, and exams aren’t for ages.”

“They’re two weeks away,” James said, nibbling at his own piece of chocolate, surprisingly daintily. “You could do with being a bit better prepared, Black.”

“Oh, I *am* sorry,” Sirius rolled his blue eyes dramatically, rolling onto his back. Remus winced. “I forgot you’d joined the swot club too.”

“One afternoon in the library does not make me a swot!” James frowned, clearly deeply offended.

“Don’t listen to him, James,” Remus grinned, “*I’m* proud of you. Thanks for the frogs, Pete.”

“Oh, they’re not from me,” Peter said, settling into the armchair beside the bed, “Dezzie says she hopes you get well soon.”

Remus, Peter and James all turned their heads at once.

“Dezzie.” Sirius said, sitting up. “You mean Desdemona?”

“Er... yeah?” Peter stopped chomping chocolate and started looking nervous. “She asked me why I couldn’t see her today, so I told her I was seeing Moony. What?!” He looked from James to Sirius, “I didn’t say anything about why he was sick, I just said—”

“You idiot!” Sirius jumped down from the bed.

“Sirius!” Remus hissed – if they were too loud Madam Pomfrey would chase them out, “It’s fine. Really.”

“It’s not fine!” Sirius seethed, he was standing over Peter now, “You can’t go telling everyone Remus is in the hospital wing! Not everyone is as slow on the uptake as you! Doesn’t the word ‘secret’ mean anything to you?!”

“You *know* it does,” Peter said, jutting out his chin, his lower lip trembling, “I’ve kept all sorts of...” he glanced furtively at Remus, then changed tact, “Anyway, Dezzie’s not everyone, she’s my *girlfriend*.”

“So what?!” Sirius raged, “You’re going to tell every tart that lets you stick your slimy tongue down her throat?!”

Peter’s eyes filled with furious tears. He sniffed, hard, and rubbed his nose, standing up.

“Just because I’ve got a girlfriend! Just because... because some of us actually *like* spending time with girls!”

Sirius’s face seemed to transform into a new, terrible kind of rage that Remus had never seen before. His heart was pounding a mile a minute, Remus could hear it clear as a bell.

“What are you trying to say, Pettigrew?”

“That I’d rather be with Dezzie than you lot, right now. Sorry, Remus.” Peter said, very quickly, before departing, storming out of the ward with a newly confident stride.

There was a steely silence, and Remus found he couldn’t bring himself to look at Sirius – whatever emotion he was working through seemed like something which ought to be private, He looked at James instead, still standing at the foot of the bed, chewing his lip. He met Remus’s eye, and gave him a reassuring smile.

“Moody pair of buggers, eh?” He broke the tension, “Anyway, how are you feeling? Moon go ok?”

“Yeah, no scars,” Remus nodded, slowly, aware of Sirius’s heart still beating loudly at his shoulder. “Nothing broken, either. Maybe I’m finally getting good at being a werewolf.”

“What did he mean?” Sirius said, suddenly, turning to look at James.

“I dunno, mate,” Potter shrugged, “Don’t listen to him, he gave as good as he got; you’re just miffed because he finally stuck up for himself.”

“He meant *something*,” Sirius muttered.

“How’s quidditch going?” Remus asked, quickly, “Ready for the final?”

James’s brow smoothed instantly, and he straightened up, eager to tell Remus all about his big plans for the upcoming Ravenclaw game. The Slytherin/Gryffindor rematch had taken place in late March, and much to everyone’s surprise, Regulus Black had resumed his role as seeker. James had

quietly told Remus afterwards that Regulus had threatened half of the Slytherins with painful disfigurement charms if word got back to Walpurga that he was back on the team.

Gryffindor had won by only five points, which was lucky, because Remus couldn't imagine Sirius being in a worse mood than he already was. Things had not been good.

For his part, Remus had been trying to be extra kind to Sirius ever since February. Though Remus had always known that the Blacks were far from an ideal, nurturing family unit, he had always sort of assumed that it couldn't be *that* bad. After all, in his experience, adults were there to maintain order, to instruct, and to punish. James had had an extremely cushy time of it, as far as Remus was concerned, so it had made sense that he was sympathetic towards Sirius.

Perhaps it was maturity, or perhaps it was having seen bright, vivacious Sirius brought low by his own mother, but Remus was finally beginning to understand that whatever went on in the noble and ancient house of Black was not normal. In fact, it was entirely unacceptable. The fact that Sirius had survived under such oppression for so long without turning into Snape or just cracking under the weight of it was remarkable. Remus knew how hard it was to push against other people's expectations – against your own nature, sometimes.

It was starting to show, though. Maybe since Remus's birthday – after Sirius had got himself so horrendously drunk and they had holed up together in that cold tunnel. Though, that might just have been when Remus first noticed it – it could well have started after Regulus's fall. But there had been a definite shift. Sirius was tired – worn out, like Remus felt after a moon. Some of the fight had left him; that much was clear. He still got angry, but it came in short bursts, and he would quickly sink into a dark and quiet mood.

The late night conversations with James had resumed, too. Remus was not invited. He didn't exactly expect to be, but he had thought they'd got a bit closer that year, and that maybe Sirius would choose to confide in *both* of them. But the only thing Sirius seemed to want from Remus these days was cigarettes – if Remus had the heart to charge him, he might have made a fortune; Sirius was rarely without a fag behind his ear, or between his lips.

"Teenage mood swings." Lily had said, decisively, when Marlene mentioned that Sirius seemed out of sorts, "Honestly," the redhead sighed, tossing her hair, "He acts like everything that happens to him is some great drama, but he's no different than the rest of us. Hormones."

"Well," Mary, frowned, "His family *is* a bit of a nightmare... dark wizards, and that. Can't be easy, with everything that's going on in the papers."

"Sirius isn't a dark wizard." Remus said, immediately,

"I know that." Mary snapped, "I just meant that he might be feeling a bit torn, that's all." She had been snapping at Remus a lot, since Snape's *Veritaserum* 'prank'. Even though Remus had apologised profusely, and many times, he couldn't deny that the things he'd said had been the truth.

"Sorry," he said again, ducking his head. "You're right. He hasn't got it easy."

"You of all people shouldn't pity him, Remus." Lily huffed, slamming down an entirely new pile of revision books.

"What's that supposed to mean?!"

"He's had every advantage over you and still can't be a nice person," she said, dividing the books

up between the four of them. “He’s ridiculously wealthy, pureblood, old magic, privately educated, has both of his parents – ugh, he and Potter are so--”

“James and Sirius are not that alike.” Was the only response Remus had.

It seemed like everyone was in a bad mood.

In the hospital wing, James had finally run out of things to say about the Ravenclaw match, which was scheduled for early May, just before exams started. He seemed to have noticed that Remus had tuned out, and had fallen silent. Sirius was bored too, and had started trying to transfigure various items around the bed – a lamp, an unused bedpan, the empty vase on the night stand.

“Sorry,” Remus said, “It’s a bit boring for you two here. You don’t have to stay.”

“Nonsense,” James waved a hand, carelessly, “Nothing else to do around here – Ravenclaw have booked the pitch for the rest of the day. And Sirius won’t come to the library with me, so...”

Potter had started putting extra effort into his studies that year for the first time, much to Sirius’s disappointment. At first, Remus had thought it was another ploy to get close to Lily, but James never asked to be involved in their study group, and actually appeared to prefer working alone. He told them that his parents had threatened to take his broom away for the summer if his results weren’t better than last year – but Sirius had whispered to Remus afterwards that actually, McGonagall had warned him that if he didn’t pull his socks up he wouldn’t get a chance at being quidditch captain.

“You can quiz me, if you want.” Remus said, cheering up a bit. “Ask me stuff about Potions, then I’ll do whichever subject you want.”

“History,” James sighed, “I am crap at History...”

“Ugh, well if you’re going to do that, I’ll go.” Sirius said, hauling himself up. “I’m crap at all of it.”

“No you’re not, don’t be stupid—”

“Nah, I’m off,” Sirius shook his head, distracted. “Maybe I’ll go and find some girls to hang around with, since that’s so important to everyone.”

“Since when has stuff Peter says bothered you?!” Remus frowned. But it was too late, Sirius was already leaving.

Remus looked at James. James ran a hand through his hair.

“Sorry, Moony, just ignore him. It’s not you – or Peter, come to that, it’s... he got an owl from home this morning.”

“Oh, right...” Remus looked down. He should have realised.

“Yeah, they’ve told him he’s got to go home for the whole summer this year – learn his family duty once and for all, or some rubbish He says he’s going to be really bored, but... I dunno, I think he’s scared, to be honest. Everyone says they’re in pretty deep with *you know who*.”

“He’ll be ok, though, won’t he?” Remus fiddled with the corner of his bedsheet anxiously, “They can’t force him to marry anyone again, and he’s not of age yet, so he can’t join up, or whatever.”

James shrugged. He looked very tired too.

“I dunno, mate,” he said, softly. “I dunno what they want. Anyway, I’m not going anywhere. Let’s start with Potions, shall we?”

Fourth Year: Partings

Thursday 29th May 1975

The exam period seemed to fly by, that year. Remus really felt as though he'd got into the swing of things for the first time, and – though he didn't like to rest on his laurels – was relatively certain he had achieved decent marks all round. Even Potions had been less stressful than usual, thanks to Lily's careful guidance and patient coaching throughout the year.

In fact, by the third week of May, Remus found himself at something of a loose end. He had completed all of his tests, but none of his friends had – between Muggle Studies and Divination, the marauders and the girls were still cloistered away studying or in the exam hall. But he was far from lonely. Remus spent his free time taking leisurely walks in the grounds, reading whatever and whenever he felt like, and putting the finishing touches to his greatest accomplishment; the marauder's map.

It had been almost four full years in the making, but Remus's original rudimentary map of Hogwarts had expanded and developed until it presented a comprehensive view of the entire castle – secret entrances, tunnels and hidden chambers included. With the marauder's help, it now moved and shifted in time with the rhythm of the building itself, located and identified every being present in the castle, and it worked beautifully. Remus had never been more proud of anything in his life – indeed, he had never created anything worth being proud of.

It still needed some kind of locking spell – at present he was able to have the ink disappear and reappear with a quick disillusionment charm, but this was not enough, not if it was to leave their dorm room. That would be something to research over the summer; he had already spoken to Madam Pince about borrowing a few books, with the understanding that he would reimburse her in full for any damage, should it occur.

Remus was looking forward to the summer perhaps even less than usual. Now that he was fully aware of the political climate in the wizarding world, he found the thought of stepping outside of it for two months very disconcerting. Who knew what could happen in the meantime – say nothing of the danger his friends might find themselves in. For the first summer since 1972, the marauders would be completely separated. Sirius had been forbidden from seeing the Potters, Remus would be at St Edmund's as usual 'for his own safety' and the Pettigrews were going to America to visit Philomena – Peter suspected to try and bring her home.

Sirius's situation was the most concerning. James had tried everything; even writing to Dumbledore, but no one was willing or able to override the Black family's wishes. Even Sirius had resigned himself somewhat to his fate.

"I'll have Reg," he sighed, heavily, "Maybe if he's not surrounded by Slytherins all the time he'll listen to a bit of reason – he's old enough, now."

Remus had promised to write; every day if Sirius wanted him to. Even Mary had offered to try and visit, as she lived in London too. Of course, she was muggleborn and it was entirely out of the question.

James actually had an escape plan ready to enact the moment Sirius gave the word – it involved a complex chain of communication, his broom, and breaking at least ten wizarding laws, but they were all ready to do it. Even Peter, who had forgiven Sirius his outburst in April and been forgiven in turn.

Remus had thought about how to spend his own summer, and had already decided he would not be repeating the events of last year. Not that he would turn down the chance to 'earn' a bit of cash if it came his way – his plans to hunt down Greyback had not altered, and would still need financing – but he also needed to stay focussed. Staying out all night drinking and fighting was not productive, nor did it solve any of his problems. He also knew that he needed to keep a low profile for as long as possible, and getting himself arrested for petty crime was not a clever move.

Having spent a fair bit of time indoors lately completing the map, and the weather being neither too hot nor too cold for May, Remus decided to venture out onto the grounds to read. He had finally read all of the muggle books Sirius had brought with him to Hogwarts in their first year, and was now borrowing from Lily. She was a big Jane Austen fan – which was a shame, as Remus wasn't, but he was making do with *Emma* all the same.

He sat under the dappled shade of a big beech tree, by the lake, with his back to the whomping willow. As he'd feared, Remus soon grew bored of Miss Woodhouse's dreadful prattling – it turned out the stupid book was all about matchmaking and he'd had plenty of that already this year, thank you very much. He put the book down and leaned against the trunk, looking up at the brilliant green leaves, his eyelids slowly sighing shut.

He had a very strange dream. (Though, Remus would think to himself much later, all dreams were pretty odd, weren't they?) He couldn't remember exactly what was going on in the dream, or where he was or who was with him. But there was perhaps another person – another body, at least, very close to his own. It was an intensely physical sensation, similar to his memories of being the wolf, but undoubtedly more pleasant. The way this other body fitted against his was deeply soothing, warm and satisfying in a way he had never felt before.

Remus wasn't sure how long he'd slept for, but when he awoke there was chatter all around him. One of the exams had obviously finished and students were pouring out onto the grounds, exalting in their hard won freedom. Remus blinked against the bright summer sunlight and straightened up, a bit embarrassed to have dozed off – not to mention the physical reaction the weird dream had prompted. He quickly rearranged his robes, looking about to check no one had noticed.

His back was stiff and sore now, from leaning against the trunk. His mouth was dry, and his left foot had gone numb. He stretched and shook it out, wincing as pins and needles shot up his leg.

"Wotcher, Remus!" A gruff, liverpudlian accent came from behind him, "Not sleeping, were you?"

"No!" He said at once, as Ferox came into view.

Remus grabbed up *Emma* and tried to pretend he had only put it down for a moment. Ferox smiled at him knowingly, but didn't make fun. He set down a heavy bucket of something slimy which smelled foul.

"Came to say goodbye to the squid." He nodded at the lake which was as still as a millpond.

"Are you going away for the summer, professor?" Remus asked, mildly interested as he rubbed his leg to get the blood flowing again.

"Mm." Ferox nodded, squinting out at the lake, "The summer and... maybe longer. 'Fraid I won't see you in September."

"What?!" Remus blinked, startled, "But... who'll teach us Care of Magical Creatures?"

"Professor Kettleburn'll be back. I was only ever filling in for him."

“Oh.” Remus had sort of known that all along, but it still came as a shock. He felt horribly sad, he’d never had to say goodbye to anyone he knew he’d miss before. He had a strong urge to tell Ferox this; to tell him how much he wished he would stay, but the words wouldn’t come. “S’a pity.” Was all he could muster.

He stood up, shakily, legs still sore. Ferox dipped a hand into the bucket of slimy silvery things and withdrew something long and wriggly. He flung it into the lake, and two tentacles broke the water’s surface to catch it. Ferox smiled.

“I won’t lie, I’ll miss this place.” He said, reaching in for another one. Squelch. He glanced at Remus, “And my best class, of course.”

“It’s... it’s my favourite subject!” Remus said, all in a hot rush.

“I should think so!” Ferox grinned, throwing another slithery thing. Splash. “I’m not s’posed to tell you your results until August, but... well, I’m bloody proud of you, Lupin. Top marks, best in the year. Better than plenty of my OWL students.”

“You’re a good teacher,” Remus said, sadly.

“So’s Kettleburn.” Ferox reassured him, still feeding the squid. Squelch. Splash.

“Where are you going? Back to the ministry?”

“Ah... no.” Ferox’s expression changed. He didn’t frown, exactly, but his features darkened, the smile faded. “I’ve some business for Dumbledore. Not sure the ministry would... anyway, it’s not for you to worry about.” He shook his head, then smiled again looking down at Remus. “I’ll be abroad for a while.”

Squelch. Splash.

Remus wondered if he would ever see Professor Ferox again. He still wasn’t quite sure how big the wizarding community really was, but he didn’t think it could be very large, not if there was only one school in Britain. Would it be ok to write to Ferox? Or was that inappropriate? He wouldn’t write to someone like McGonagall, for example, or Professor Slughorn.

“I’ll be asking Kettleburn for updates, y’know.” Ferox said, reading his mind, “So don’t think you can start slacking. Us dead-end oiks have to show the rest of the posh nobs how it’s done, eh? Now more than ever.”

“I won’t slack off,” Remus said, fiercely, “I promise.”

Ferox laughed and nudged Remus with an elbow,

“Good lad. Your dad’d be proud.”

* * *

Friday 27th June 1975

It was the last Friday of term, all of the exams and lessons were finished for another year, and Remus had made a mental list of all of the packing he needed to do. This year he and James had conspired together to ensure that all of Sirius’s got done in time – James was gradually warming to the idea of letting Remus help when it came to Sirius’s welfare. They planned that on Saturday morning James and Peter would take him out for a few hour’s flying, while Remus would sort

through everything. He'd promised he didn't mind; anything that might help.

They were all sitting around at dinner –nothing special, just fish pie, the feast wouldn't be until Sunday night – when the owls began to fly in for last post.

"Ugh." Sirius groaned as a large brown eagle owl landed in front of him. One of the Black family owls.

"I'll do it." James jumped in quickly, tugging the small scroll wrapped around the bird's scaly leg. He pushed his round glasses back on his nose, and his eyes darted quickly across the paper. Then he shrugged and scrunched it up, tossing it over his shoulder. "Just making sure you know you have to meet them at King's Cross, they're expecting you and Regulus to be together."

"Worried I'll pull another disappearing act." Sirius smirked.

"Er... will you?" Peter asked, nervously.

"Not worth it." Sirius sighed, "Bet they'll be there early just to spite me. I'll have to come up with another way to piss them off."

"Or you could just try to keep your head down and make it through the summer." Remus suggested, lightly, finishing his ice cream.

Sirius just raised an eyebrow at him. Remus poked his tongue out. They both knew that was pretty much impossible, even if Sirius tried his very best.

They didn't have long to feel sorry for Sirius, however – Mary, who had also received some post, let out a shriek, then burst into tears. The owl in front of her hopped back, alarmed, then gave an offended 'hoot' and flapped away to the owlery.

"Mary!" Lily and Marlene both said at once, "What's wrong?"

Mary shook her head, apparently speechless, then covered her mouth and fled the dining hall. Lily and Marlene glanced at each other, then jumped up immediately to follow her.

"What d'you think's up with her?" Peter asked.

Remus shrugged.

"Girl stuff."

They did not find out until later that evening. Mary was not in the common room, but Lily came down looking for a stray cardigan she had left somewhere.

"Darren dumped her," she said gravely to Remus, "She's a complete wreck, poor thing."

"Right before the holidays?" Remus said, shocked, "Bit harsh!"

"Yeah," Lily replied, sadly, "Said he couldn't be bothered waiting around for her while she's at school all year – wants a girlfriend closer to home. I think she's well shot of him, he sounds horrible."

"Bet Marlene's happy, though," Remus grinned, "Won't have to hear about it anymore."

"Don't bet on it," Lily's face was grim, "She hasn't shut up about how much she loved him yet..."

“Poor thing.” Remus dug around in his pocket and withdrew his last sugar quill, “Give her this, tell her I hope she feels better, eh?”

“Ahh, you’re so sweet, Remus,” Lily kissed him on the cheek, then headed upstairs again.

“She wasn’t that upset when she broke up with *me*,” Sirius muttered indignantly, moving a chess piece.

“Well,” Remus shrugged, settling back down to the game, “She dumped you, didn’t she. I expect it’s different when you’re the one getting dumped.”

“*I* wasn’t that upset.”

“I didn’t think you and Mary were that serious,” James yawned, playing exploding snap on the rug with Peter. “You were only thirteen.”

“Fourteen.” Sirius corrected. “But I take your point. Didn’t really give it a fair go, did we?”

“You weren’t very mature about it,” Peter murmured, thumbing through his cards.

“No, well no one ever caught us snogging in broom cupboards, you’re right,” Sirius snapped.

“Jealousy doesn’t suit you, Black,” Peter replied, dryly.

“Oi, you all promised me the snogging thing was over.” Remus said, pointedly, giving them all a dark look.

“Don’t knock it ‘til you’ve tried it, Moony,” Peter grinned.

Fourth Year: June

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Saturday 28th June 1975

“Hiya, Remus!” Lily startled him as he was leaving the hospital wing. He’d just had his final check up with Madam Pomfrey before school ended.

“Hello.” He said, nervously, “What are you doing here?”

“Dropping these off for Professor Slughorn,” she raised a large jar of something that looked like purple frogspawn, “We’ve been doing healing potions in Slug Club this term. Wait here, I’ll walk back with you.”

She disappeared inside the infirmary and he waited, trying not to look too suspicious. He hated being seen near the hospital. Lily finally came out with a breezy smile,

“Thanks! What were you doing in there?”

“Oh, nothing, I um... a hex that went wrong.”

“Oh gosh, what happened?”

“Er... I’d rather not say.” He raised an eyebrow suggestively, hoping that she would get the picture. Fortunately, her mind went elsewhere,

“Was it Potter again? Ugh, he hexed Sev last week with something that made his neck swell up like a life ring!”

“Huh, yeah, James is good at engorgement charms,” Remus grinned.

“Well I wouldn’t have thought he’d hex the people who are supposedly his friends,” Lily replied, primly.

“It wasn’t him!” Remus replied, annoyed. He was keen not to badmouth James in front of Lily, after the mix up back in January.

“Black, then.” Lily shrugged, “He’s just as bad. No idea why everyone fancies him.”

“Mm.”

“So... Big plans for the summer?” Lily changed tact, perhaps realising that Remus didn’t particularly enjoy her tirades on the other marauders.

“Nah,” Remus shook his head, “Usual stuff, probably. Homework. You?”

“I’m going to visit Marlene in July, we’re trying to get Mary to come.”

“How is she?”

Mary had been absent from every meal since the big break up, and had barely left the girls dorm as far as Remus could tell.

“Better,” Lily nodded, sadly, “She can go a few hours without crying, anyway. Keeps playing depressing Dusty Springfield albums, though.”

They reached the portrait of the fat lady and bumped into Peter – and Desdemona Lewis, of course. They were in a tight embrace, arms wrapped around each other, murmuring between kisses;

“I’ll miss you!” She sighed,

“I’ll miss you more!” Peter said.

“Will you write?”

“Every day!”

Remus made loud retching noises, which made Lily giggle, but earned a furious frown from Peter. They quickly climbed through the portrait and left the lovebirds to it.

Gryffindor tower was complete anarchy when they reached it – as was usual on the last day of term. Students crawled under tables looking for lost things, ran around collecting up cards and game pieces, shouts of ‘*accio left trainer!*’ or ‘*Accio wristwatch!*’ rang out as everyone scrambled to pack at the very last minute. Remus couldn’t help but wonder whether every common room was undergoing the same pandemonium – surely the organised Ravenclaws were in a much better state.

Sirius and James were not doing much to help the process – they were covertly levitating various items from behind one of the large armchairs, snickering to each other happily. Remus smiled, thinking again how much he would miss everything.

“You two!” Lily scolded them, marching over, holding her own wand up.

Sirius laughed and ducked behind James,

“Come on, Evans, just a bit of last day high spirits!”

“Why can’t you just leave people be, Black?!”

“Why can’t you leave *us* be,” he retorted, firing green sparks at the ceiling from behind James’s back, “You’re not a prefect yet, y’know!”

“Oooh, just wait ‘til I am!” She said, trying to throw a jinx at Sirius. It hit James instead, and turnips immediately sprung from his ears, the shocked expression on his face so comical that Remus collapsed into giggles.

“Well *that* wasn’t very goody-goody,” Sirius laughed, transfiguring a nearby lamp into a flock of birds which fluttered screeching around the room, adding to the chaos.

Lily’s next move was to shoot a jelly-legs jinx at James, causing him to fall to the floor in a heap, still clutching his turnip ears. With him out of the way and Sirius exposed, Lily disabled him with a binding spell, then turned to Remus.

“Help me sort all this out, will you?”

“Aww... ok, fine,” Remus sighed, still wiping tears of laughter away from his eyes. Together they managed to restore the common room to order, de-transfigure the lamp, repair the singe marks on the ceiling and calm down a wailing first year who had lost her cat. Lily left Remus to handle James and Sirius, who were in a real state now.

“Isn’t she marvellous,” James grinned dopily, as Remus tried to help him into a nearby chair, his legs still unsteady, folding underneath him.

“Yeah, a real charmer,” Sirius grumbled, struggling to get free from his body-bind.

“You two are just lucky she only uses her power for good,” Remus chastened them, “You’d be no match for her if she decided to start really breaking the rules. *Finite*.” He pointed his wand at Sirius, who was finally released. He rubbed his arms fiercely,

“Can’t believe you helped her, Moony!”

“Of course I did,” Remus shrugged, “I’m terrified of her.”

* * *

Sunday 29th June 1975

“Oi, you two! We’ll miss the train!” Remus huffed, climbing the stairs to their dorm for what felt like the hundredth time that morning.

Their trunks had already been transported down to Hogsmeade station by some magical mechanism, and McGonagall had given the ten minute warning, but James and Sirius had vanished again.

He found them sitting on James’s bed, which was stripped of bedclothes, heads bowed over something small Sirius was holding cupped carefully in his hands. The room felt horribly hollow and empty without all of the marauders things in it. The two black haired boys turned towards him as he entered, and Remus felt he had intruded on something very private. He hung back a moment, awkwardly.

“Sorry, Moony,” James smiled, climbing off the bed, “We’re ready, eh Black?”

“Yeah, ‘course,” Sirius got up too. He had a dazed, distracted expression which made Remus ache on the inside. “Look what James gave me,” Sirius said, as he crossed the room. He held out something round and silver. Remus took it. It was warm from Sirius’s hands. It was a compact mirror, beautifully etched with an ornate filigree style design.

“Er...” Remus turned it over, snapping it open, “Very um... pretty?”

James laughed,

“It’s magic – belonged to my grandad. Look,” He opened his own, identical compact and looked into it. Remus looked down at Sirius’s mirror, and was amazed to see James’s bespectacled face grinning back at him. “So we can keep in touch over the summer.”

“Oh my god!” Remus exclaimed, “That’s amazing!”

“I know,” James nodded, closing his compact and slipping it into his back pocket. “Wish I could have got them for all of us, but they’re old family heirlooms and there’s only two...”

“Oh, of course,” Remus handed the corresponding case back to Sirius. There was an awkward few seconds silence, before Remus cleared his throat, “C’mon, McGonagall’s gonna hex us into next week if we miss the carriages.”

They did make the carriages, and the train in time, and piled into their usual compartment.

Remus was most disconcerted to find that this year their little carriage space was packed full of people. Not only the four marauders, but of course Desdemona was invited to join them – Remus had still not heard her say more than two words, possibly because her lips were so often occupied.

Mary joined them too, at Sirius's request. He had been paying her a good deal of attention over the past few days, and it was obvious she was rather enjoying it, having recently taken a heavy knock to her confidence. With Mary as always was Marlene, and finally Lily, who would have been forced to sit alone, otherwise.

As such, it was an incredibly noisy ride back to London. Between Sirius trying to impress Mary by singing every Beatles song he knew, James switching between trying to attract Lily's attention and talk quidditch tactics with Marlene, and Peter and Desdemona's fevered fumbblings, Remus simply sat back against the window and enjoyed being among friends for what might be the last time in a very long time.

He tried not to think about the war, or who might go missing over the summer. He tried not to think about Sirius, alone and abused in a cold London mansion. He tried not to think about Ferox, off on dangerous missions for Dumbledore. He just watched his friends, their faces bright and animated, full of excitement and emotion.

He rubbed the back of his head, sleepily. His skinhead cut had grown out, and he had a pile of mousey brown curls now. He might not cut it again. He wouldn't let Matron do it, he decided; it was better longer. Softer. He didn't want to look hard and mean anymore, he didn't feel like he needed to. Smiling to himself, Remus drifted to sleep.

* * *

Fourth year, epilogue: Some hours later...

Remus dragged his trunk from the bus, and down the long road to St Edmund's all by himself. It was the first year Matron hadn't met him at King's Cross – she'd sent him his bus fare ahead of time and told him he was old enough now to make the journey alone. Perhaps she hoped he wouldn't come back at all. But where else would he go?

He entered the cold grey building with a sense of resignation, signed himself in at the front desk and made his way to his dorm. It was a bright, warm day, and he could hear most of the other boys shouting outside. He was hot and sticky, and hoping for a shower and a few quiet hours alone in which he could unpack and maybe get started on his summer reading. But as he entered the dorm room, he found he was not entirely alone.

There was a boy sitting on the bed adjacent to his. He must have been new; Remus didn't recognise him from last year. He looked about fifteen or sixteen, and wore a light blue vest top with orange piping and long flared denim jeans. His socks didn't match. His hair was blond and curly, his face sunny and snub nosed. He had a casual, friendly air.

"Oh, hello." Remus said quietly, dragging his trunk over to his bed.

"Orright?" The other boy greeted him. He had a chipped front tooth and a lopsided grin that made Remus want to smile back at him. His hair was long-ish and fell into his eyes. "You're the kid wot goes to the fancy school all year, are ya? Name's Grant."

Remus nodded, politely,

“Remus. Nice to meet you.”

“Blimey,” Grant cracked an even wider smile, “They said you was posh! Wan’ me to bow to ya, *m’lord?*”

Remus returned a soft smile, unable to help himself. The other boy wasn’t being rude, or nasty. He forgot how much his accent had changed, after four years at Hogwarts.

“Big reader, are ya?” Grant nodded at the books Remus was unpacking.

“I get a lot of homework.” Remus said. Then he decided to relax a bit, “And yeah, I like reading.”

“Cool.” Grant replied. He lay back on the bed, arms behind his head, his long body stretched out, shirt rising up to expose the strip of skin just above his hips. Remus glanced at him sideways as he unpacked, trying not to look *too* much like he was looking. “So,” Grant was saying, “What sort of music d’you like?”

Chapter End Notes

British slang note: 'Trainers' are what we call 'sneakers' in the south of England

Summer 1975

Chapter Summary

CW for small mention of homophobic violence.

Selected letters between the marauders:

Dear Moony,

I'm pretty sure I can get away with writing letters at least for now. I imagine they're being read, but I DON'T GIVE A SHIT, DO YOU HEAR ME, REGULUS??

Dreadful so far. Looks like Mum tried to take down my Gryffindor stuff while I was away, but I put it up with permanent sticking charms. I'm going to see if there's anything else I can put up to piss her off.

There's a big family meeting next week, posh dinner, dress robes, best behaviour etc. etc. James thinks I should keep my head down and just make note of who attends and what gets said in case it's useful later. I don't know. Sort of want to set off some dungbombs instead. What would you do?

Sirius.

* * *

Sirius,

Getting on with Reg, then? Go easy on him, you don't have anyone else on your side.

Please be careful. I don't know what I'd do, I've never been to a posh dinner. Probably make a twat of myself. Don't do anything stupid, ok? James is usually right.

Remus.

* * *

Dear Remus,

Can't believe I have to spend the whole summer without any of you. Sometimes I really hate being an only child. I bet you're never lonely, at St Edmund's.

Sirius seems ok, he checks in pretty often, I think he's bored. If boredom is the worst of it, then that's a good thing, right? I keep trying to convince him not to make a fuss – we don't know what sort of thing the Blacks are involved in. Could be nothing at all.

Hope your summer is off to a good start. Have you looked at the homework? That Charms essay looks like a right ball ache.

James.

* * *

James,

He'd be fine if he could control himself, but I doubt it. Keep talking to him, remind him he's got to get back to Hogwarts in one piece.

Summer is fine. You're right, I don't ever get lonely. I wouldn't mind a bit of privacy most of the time, but this summer's been good. Don't worry about me.

That Charms essay is a doddle and you know it. You just don't like hard work, Potter.

Remus.

* * *

Moony,

Greetings from San Francisco! I thought it would be hot here, but it's bloody freezing and rains most of the time. Merlin knows why Philomena would want to live here, it's no different than dear old Blighty.

Pete.

* * *

Dear Moony,

Caused uproar this week, it was brilliant. Found a bunch of old muggle posters in a skip down the road – pictures of girls, you know the sort. They don't even move, it's hilarious. Anyway, stuck them up on the walls with my patented sticking charm, and mum IS FURIOUS.

I think she's probably only annoyed because they're muggle girls, she couldn't care less that they've got their tits out. Anyway, now I can't go out unsupervised. Worth it, though.

Sirius.

* * *

Sirius,

You're an idiot and you know it. Posters??? Don't you feel weird with them all staring at you?

Remus.

* * *

Dear Remus,

Really worried about Sirius. I don't know if he told you about the stunt he pulled with the posters, but he's a bloody idiot for doing it. Don't believe him if he says he's fine, he'd definitely been crying when I spoke to him last with the mirror (don't tell him I told you that, obviously).

Standby in case we need to trigger the rescue mission.

James.

* * *

James,

Ready when you are.

Remus.

* * *

Moony,

Don't listen to Potter, he's an old woman. Everything's fine, nothing I can't cope with. Hope you're having a good summer. Can't wait for September.

Sirius.

* * *

Friday 22nd August 1975

Remus staggered weakly into the dorm room. It had been a bad one. Madam Pomfrey thought it must be because of the change of scenery. He had a long thick scar across his chest, now – it had been ages since he'd got a scar.

Grant sat up abruptly, looking hurt.

"Where you been?" He asked, "Thought you'd got arrested or summink."

"Sick," Remus replied.

"Sick wiv what?"

Remus sighed, flopping down on his bed. It had been a hard night, and he just wanted to sleep. He closed his eyes. He didn't feel like excuses today.

"Well, it was the full moon last night, you see." He said, calmly, "When I was five I was bitten by a werewolf and now I am one. I turn every month, and Matron locks me up so I don't hurt anyone else."

"Oh, *ha ha*." Grant replied, climbing onto Remus' bed, straddling him. They were both so skinny they fit easily together on the narrow bunk. "Very funny, clever clogs. Fine, don't tell me."

He leaned forward and kissed Remus.

Remus opened his eyes, freezing for a moment. "S'fine," Grant assured him, stroking his cheek, "They're all outside, I checked."

Remus kissed him back.

It had been a strange sort of summer, but one of the most pleasant Remus had ever had. He hadn't been lonely, for once; hadn't counted down the days until the first of September.

In the beginning, he and Grant had bonded over David Bowie, T-Rex and Neil Young – even Deep

Purple, who Grant was crazy about and Remus thought Sirius would probably like. They both hated football – and the other boys – so they sloped off together around town, or sat behind the big empty portakabins smoking stolen packs of fags.

They had been sitting there on the hot gravel one day in mid-July, flicking stones and debating the finer points of *Electric Warrior*, when suddenly Grant's hand was on Remus' knee, then at his waist, pulling him closer.

“What are you-!?”

“It's all right,” Grant whispered, desperation edging his voice, pressing his forehead against Remus's hot cheek, “No one's gonna find out.” He tasted like cigarettes and sunburn.

After that, whenever they were alone together they were snogging.

It was sort of a surprise, but mostly not. Remus quickly realised that he had always wanted it – this, or something like it. Like a fog lifting. All things considered, he was grateful to Grant for having taken the initiative.

It wasn't what you could call romantic, or affectionate. More like a necessary thing. Something Remus knew that he had to push as far as it would go, so that he could identify all of the hard edges and sharp limits of it. He was mapping out his own desires, and using Grant as a compass.

His full name was Grant Chapman. He had just turned sixteen, and he'd been at St. Edmund's since May, though it was by no means his first Home. Both of Grant's parents were living, and he even had some extended family – grandparents and aunts and uncles and grown-up cousins. But none of them seemed to want to keep him on for very long,

“Too much of a handful,” Grant would grin, cheekily. “Everyone gets sick of me in the end.”

Like most of the boys at St Edmund's, he did badly at school and had been in trouble with the police a few times on minor offences, though he'd never been officially arrested. He wasn't violent, but he had a mouth on him and a tendency to talk back. But there wasn't a threatening bone in his body, he was so clearly good all over.

He had a spectacular smile; it creased his whole face and made you like him at once. One of his canine teeth was a bit wonky and it was nothing short of endearing. Remus couldn't see why no one wanted him around. He was a bit silly sometimes; a bit immature, but that was ok – Remus knew he could be too serious a lot of the time. Something about Grant's chirpy, happy-go-lucky nature made Remus more confident – comfortable. And Grant just *liked* Remus so much. Really liked him.

“You're the funniest bloke I ever met.” Grant laughed, when Remus hadn't even said anything that amusing. “Mind you, never copped off with anyone from a *private* school before.”

“I'm no different from you,” Remus replied, “A care home yob.”

“Piss off,” Grant shoved him, playfully, “You're going places, anyone can see that.”

Remus didn't have a response to that, but it made him smile. Grant often made him smile.

Besides all of these things, Grant was a really, really good kisser. At least, Remus assumed as much, considering that Grant was the only person he had ever kissed. The first time, he'd felt a wild thrill as he thought to himself; *so THIS is what all the fuss is about!*

He could snog Grant all day long, without coming up for air. Sometimes he found himself compulsively pursing his lips in the night, hot with withdrawal pangs. Remus had expected kissing to be scary and awkward, but – as with so many things – Grant just put him ease. He made it *fun*, right from the beginning; no fuss, no questions.

“If you’re only here for the summer then we might as well enjoy it, eh?” He would say, cheerfully, “Don’t worry, I ain’t exactly about to propose, sweet as you are.”

“Sweet!” Remus scoffed.

“Sweet,” Grant winked, “And too bloody good for me by half.”

Remus hated that kind of talk, and shut him up with another kiss.

They had to hide most of the time, of course. From the other boys, and from the staff. Remus couldn’t imagine what would happen if they were found out – they’d be separated, definitely, even if they weren’t beaten to a pulp. Would Matron tell Dumbledore? Could they expel you, for being a... well, for kissing other boys? Fortunately, Grant had some experience in covert operations, and they never even came close to being disturbed.

“How many times have you done this sort of thing?” Remus got up the courage to ask, one day. They were behind some disused bike sheds at the local secondary school.

“Few times,” Grant shrugged, “Not enough. You?”

“Never!” Remus replied, shocked. “I didn’t even...”

“Oh bless ya,” Grant laughed lightly, tugging one of Remus’s curls, “You didn’t know.”

Remus shook his head, his ears growing hot. Grant tutted, “Never look at another bloke a bit too long? Never get that feeling about a film star, or a teacher?”

“...Oh my god!” Remus gasped, images of Ferox crashing down on him. Grant laughed again.

“And I thought you were all at it, you boarding school lads.”

Remus just shook his head again in disbelief, wondering if there was anything else he didn’t know about himself.

As September approached Remus found himself trying to ignore it. He felt guilty for not having spent the summer worrying about the war, for being distracted by his own selfish urges, especially at a time like this. But at the same time, he felt that he might never have this opportunity again.

The other marauders sent letters, as they did every summer – Remus diligently wrote back, not wanting them to worry. He said nothing at all about Grant. He didn’t know *what* to say, sure that if he put pen to paper it would all come spilling out, and the other boys would never speak to him again. Or worse; they’d try to understand it, without looking him in the eye.

That was part of it. On the other hand, Remus just *liked* the idea of keeping it to himself. The marauders didn’t have to know *everything* about him, and he was allowed to have other friends, wasn’t he?

Fifth Year: Silver

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Monday 1st September 1975

Hey, hey mama said the way you move -

Gon' make you sweat, gon' make you groove.

Ah ah child way ya shake that thing -

Gon' make you burn, gon' make you sting.

Hey, hey baby when you walk that way -

Watch your honey drip, I can't keep away...

Remus shifted uncomfortably as he waited for a quiet moment to run at the ticket barrier. He was glad Matron hadn't come with him this year. Glad to have had the time alone to prepare himself. Grant had wanted to come, but Matron said no, and wouldn't give him the fare anyway.

They'd managed a quick goodbye locked inside a bathroom at St. Edmund's – one of their many hiding places. Neither of them had said any of the things they'd wanted to say – actually, they'd hardly spoken at all – but with minutes left, Remus promised he'd try to write.

"I'm crap at writing," Grant complained, "Can't you give me the phone number?"

"Er... it's a really old fashioned school. We don't get to use the phone much." Remus blagged. He thought there *might* be a phone box in Hogsmeade, or maybe the next village over, which was non-magical. He could try.

Now, as he took aim at the grey ticket barrier and started forward, he had that usual sensation of leaving the muggle world – and everyone in it – behind for another year. Grant did not exist on this side of the platform. Grant had never happened, and Remus was the same old Remus.

Nothing has changed, he told himself. *Nothing is different*. Matron hadn't insisted he cut his hair this time, so he wasn't beginning the term looking like an oik. He was taller, again – he wondered if he'd ever *stop* growing sometimes – but other than these silly, superficial things, everything was as it had been. As it should be.

No one would notice, because there was nothing *to* notice, Remus told himself, firmly. Nothing at all. He rubbed the back of his head, absent-mindedly, then – remembering Grant's fingers having been there only hours before, wiped his lips self-consciously. Shit.

"All right you tosser?!" James slapped him on the back out of nowhere.

"James, really!" Mrs Potter chastised her son, standing beside him. She beamed up at Remus, "Just look at you! You've grown inches!" She pulled him into a hug, "Still far too skinny for my liking!" She began to straighten his clothes, peppering him with questions – did he have something to eat for the journey? Had he come alone? Did he want help getting his things aboard?

By the end of this motherly assault, Remus was grinning from ear to ear, relaxed in the knowledge that everything was, indeed, fine. Nothing was different at all. He cheerfully boarded the train with James and Peter, chattering about their summers and their excitement for the year ahead. James had a silver pin on his chest, emblazoned with a large 'C' (Remus could smell it the second James came close, an irritating sting in his nostrils) he had got his dearest wish and was now quidditch captain.

They sat in their usual compartment and Remus pulled his book from his bag, settling in with a satisfied sigh.

Then Sirius walked in, and Remus's stomach dropped through the floor.

He was *almost* the same as ever – height-wise he had nearly caught up with James now, and he was broader about the chest. His jaw had squared, and perhaps his nose had lengthened – but he had the same glossy black hair, the same arresting eyes and high cheekbones.

He was still *Sirius*, but he was somehow... other. As if Remus was seeing him through new eyes. The heat of desire flared up in his chest out of nowhere, settling in his cheeks as a heavy blush. He looked away, quickly, before anyone noticed.

"Gentlemen," Sirius nodded graciously, entering the carriage like a prince.

"Alright?" The other two grinned and Remus mumbled.

Sirius sat directly opposite Remus, his hair and uniform purposefully untidy – no doubt for the benefit of Walpurga Black – and flung out his legs, as if he didn't expect them to be as long as they were. His ankle bumped against Remus's, and Remus shot up, suddenly, sitting bolt upright and tucking his own gangly legs neatly under his seat. Sirius gave him a funny look, then a smirking grin which caused a sharp tug behind Remus's naval.

Oh god, he thought, no no no!

"Half expected you not to be here," James said, relieved.

"Couldn't have the Black heir not turning up for his first day of school," Sirius rolled his dark blue eyes, raising an artful eyebrow, "Couldn't have the whole wizarding world knowing that there's strife in my noble family."

"How are you?" James asked, earnestly, "Did they... how are you?"

"Fine," Sirius nodded, a bit stiffly, "Don't want to talk about it now. Can we just pretend it's a normal first day?"

"Yeah, all right mate," James nodded, unconvincingly. "Pete was just telling us about California,"

"We didn't manage to find Phil," Peter said, "Her housemates said she'd moved on, everywhere we looked. Mum was... well she was really upset, it was crap."

Remus felt a stab of guilt. It was so long ago now, but he had once told Philomena that she could run away if she wanted – 'no one says you have to use magic'. After his own, blissfully simple, magic-free summer, Remus was starting to envy Peter's sister.

The train had pulled out of the station, and the grey London buildings were whooshing by, soon to give way to the lush green fields of the home counties.

“How was your summer, Moony?” James asked, suddenly, and Remus realised Peter had stopped talking some time ago.

“Yeah, fine,” Remus had practiced this in his head on the way to King’s Cross. But he hadn’t counted on Sirius looking so... it was difficult to stay focussed. “Usual. Nothing exciting. Um. Football, homework. Er... yeah, fine. Not great. But... well, fine, not bad. Fine.”

Thankfully, the door to their carriage slid open, putting a stop to his blabbering. Lily Evans stood in the doorway, beaming with delight, her hair a fiery halo.

“Evans!” James boomed, eagerly, “You found me!”

“As if it’s hard, Potter,” Lily rolled her eyes, “You lot are always in the same car. Anyway, I’m not here for you, I’m here for *you*!” She pointed at Remus, still grinning,

“Me?!” Remus frowned, confused for a moment, then it dawned on him. He sighed, heavily, wanting to sink into his chair and disappear. The other three marauders and Lily were all staring at him with varying expressions, all expectant.

“You got it, didn’t you?” Lily said, impatiently, “Come on, we have to go for a meeting in the—”

“Merlin!” Sirius suddenly exclaimed, slapping his forehead comically. “How did we forget?! Moony, are you a...”

“A prefect!” James yelled. Remus hung his head.

“Yeah...”

“And you didn’t tell us immediately so that we could rip the piss out of you?!” Sirius’s face had lit up, some of the old eleven-year-old mischief maker showing through.

“You’re just jealous,” Lily said, haughtily, “Come on Remus, where’s your badge?”

“The badge!” Sirius burst out laughing, “I forgot about the badge! Oh please, Moony, show us the badge!”

Peter and James’s shoulders were shaking too, and Remus shook his head, trying to look disapproving.

“It’s in my trunk.”

“Well put it on!” Lily said, “C’mon, we have our own carriage and everything.”

“Hey Evans, I’m quidditch captain, y’know,”

“Yes, Marlene said.” Lily said, without so much as glancing in James’s direction, “Come *on*, Remus!”

“Ugh, ok. But the badge is right in the bottom of the trunk, I’ll wear it tomorrow.” Remus said, getting up.

“Oh, no, we can look for it, if you want?”

“No, I can’t be bothered.” Remus shrugged, not looking at her.

“Oh, go on,” Sirius wheedled, getting up and reaching for Remus’s trunk, “We want to see you in

your nice, shiny badge...”

“No!” Remus snapped, glaring at Sirius – thank goodness it was still easy to get annoyed with him – he raised his eyebrows, so Lily couldn’t see, and said very pointedly, “Silver isn’t my colour.”

Sirius’s eyes widened immediately in realisation. Remus raised his eyebrows and followed Lily out. He glanced back through the glass door just in time to see James quickly removing his own pin.

* * *

Being a prefect was as bad as Remus had expected. The letter had come as much as a surprise to him as to everyone else – the pin fell out of his usual Hogwarts reading list and into his lap one summer morning. He’d hissed with pain as the silver burned his fingers, and dropped it on the floor. Grant picked it up,

“What the bloody hell is this?!”

“I’m a prefect.” Remus said, not believing it himself.

“A... a what?! Jesus, sometimes I think I’ve made you up.”

“You don’t know the half of it,” Remus had groaned, “My friends are never going to let me live this down...”

“Ha! Good!” Grant stuck out his pink tongue.

Remus just shook his head again, and resolved to write a letter to Dumbledore about this, demanding that someone else be given the job. James would be good. Even *Peter* would be better than Remus. Dumbledore had not responded. He tried McGonagall, who did respond, simply saying that the decision was final. Remus decided to try again once term started.

On the train, Lily and Remus had to attend an extremely tiresome meeting with all of the other prefects, led by the interminably boring Head boy and girl. After that, they were expected to ‘patrol’ the corridors, stopping anyone from having any fun. Unfortunately Lily took this duty very seriously, and Remus got the feeling it was going to be a very long year. Still, it was much preferable to sitting in a confined space with Sirius – he would have to do his best to steer clear for a while, until he’d worked out this latest revelation.

The feast was ok. It felt less merry than previous years – Remus didn’t know if that was his own turmoil, or the pallor of the war. There were less students than usual; only a handful of first years. No one was mentioning it.

After dinner, Lily made Remus patrol again, and he actually didn’t mind. He hoped that if he could stay away long enough the others would be in bed; then he wouldn’t have to see them until lessons the next morning – if James and Sirius left early for quidditch practice.

“You’re still not wearing your pin,” Lily said, as they walked the length of the fourth floor hall.

“Yeah, sorry,” Remus yawned, “I’ll find it tomorrow, promise.”

“So, how was summer?”

“Yeah, great!” Remus grinned wider than he meant to. Lily smiled back at him, looking genuinely pleased.

“Oh, that’s lovely! What did you do?”

“Um... oh nothing. Loads of homework.”

“Weirdo.” Lily elbowed him, laughing, “Even I don’t like homework that much.”

* * *

He was right, by the time he got back to the common room, everyone had gone to bed, and the marauder’s bedroom was dark and quiet. He padded quietly into the bathroom, brushed his teeth and pulled on his pyjamas, then crept over to his bed, drawing the curtains tight. It felt as though he had only just relaxed properly, when he heard Sirius get out of bed. He knew each of his roommates by their footsteps now. He used to like knowing it – now it felt like a peculiar kind of torture, as Sirius drew closer, and hissed;

“Moony? Psst... oi, even you don’t fall asleep that easily!”

Remus groaned, crawled to the edge of the bed and opened the curtains.

“What??”

“Oh c’mon, why are you avoiding us? Is it the prefect thing? You know we’re just teasing, lighten up! Here, I’ve got something for you.” He opened his hand. In the dark, Remus leaned over and saw his red and silver prefect pin. He frowned,

“Is this a joke?”

“No, take it! Trust me, Remus.” Sirius caught his eye, and Remus’s mind went completely blank. He accepted the pin, waited, and felt... nothing. He blinked, and looked down,

“What?!”

“Transfigured it,” Sirius smiled, looking thrilled. His teeth gleamed in the dark. “It’s tin, now. Did the same to James’s. I reckon I can get Mary to pinch Evans’s too, and I’ll do that. You’ll be spending loads of time with her, so might as well...”

“Thank you...”

“Don’t be silly,” Sirius shook his head, still smiling, eyes soft. “Anything for our Moony. G’night.” He turned and crept back to his own bed.

Remus fell back onto his pillows, exhaling heavily, still clutching the pin so tight it bit into his palm. He flung the covers over his head, and willed his heart to stop pounding. *Oh god*, he thought, grimly. *I fancy Sirius Black.*

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Black Dog', by Led Zeppelin.

Fifth Year: Pain

Chapter Summary

CW: Dark themes, domestic abuse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus overslept the next morning, and would have missed breakfast if Peter hadn't shouted his name about a hundred times before leaving himself. As the door slammed, Remus rolled onto his back and stared at a chink of light coming through his curtains. He had slept badly, and resigned himself to sleeping badly every night until he'd got this ridiculous Sirius thing out of his system.

The first thing to do was to *stop thinking about it*, he told himself, sternly, jumping up out of bed and heading straight for the shower. Cold as he could stand it. James and Sirius must have left early for quidditch. A memory of Sirius in his scarlet robes surfaced; hair pulled back, face glistening, that energetic, competitive glint in his eyes. Remus groaned, and turned the shower knob all the way down from lukewarm to icy.

He forced himself to think about something else – Charms, or Arithmancy, or History... yes, he found that listing off the names of the generals involved in each side of the Great Goblin revolt of 1642 seemed to calm him down a bit. Gave him something to focus on anyway. You couldn't have lustful thoughts with names like 'Krebshunk' and 'Frip the Disembowler' running through your head.

He dressed and headed down for breakfast. Their first lesson was Transfiguration, and you could never get away with being late for McGonagall. In the Great Hall, Peter was sitting at the Ravenclaw table with Desdemona, and they were clearly getting reacquainted after a very long summer apart. Remus sighed a little, inwardly, remembering how that felt. It was even worse to watch other couples snogging when you knew what you were missing.

Sirius and James were at the Gryffindor table, both dressed in their school uniform, but decidedly rumpled from practice. Their body language was very out of character; Sirius was turned away from James, nose in the air, James looked furtive and wound up - if Remus didn't know better, he'd have thought they were in the middle of a row.

As he sat down opposite his two friends, he found that his first impression had been correct. They were sitting in stony silence, and it was clear that Sirius was being very stubborn about something.

"Morning." Remus said, tentatively, reaching for some toast and jam.

"Morning, your prefect-ness," Sirius replied, with half a smile. He was pouring spoonful after spoonful of brown sugar into his porridge.

"Hiya, Moony," James said, glancing over at him briefly before turning back to Sirius. He looked worn out, stressed. It did not suit him. "Sirius." He said, very seriously.

Sirius ignored him. "*Sirius*." James repeated, louder.

“Not now, Potter. I’m busy.”

“You’re playing with your breakfast.” James wrinkled his nose, “And please don’t eat that, my teeth hurt just looking at it.”

Remus thought it looked good, actually. He liked very sweet things, especially when he was in a bad mood. He kept this opinion to himself. Best not to get involved, where James and Sirius were concerned.

Sirius finished pouring his last teaspoon of sugar, stirred it vigorously, until the mixture had turned the texture and colour of sand. He scooped up a heaped spoonful, then - making eye contact with James the whole time - shoved it in his mouth and chewed. Remus could hear the grains of sugar crunching between his teeth. James shook his head,

“You don’t have to be like *that*, I’m not Regulus.” He said, grumpily.

Sirius scowled at him, then stood up.

“Gotta go to the library.” He said, his mouth still full of oversweet porridge. “See you in Transfiguration.”

James sighed, heavily, watching Sirius leave. Remus breathed a small sigh of relief, but felt immediately guilty about it. There was obviously something wrong with his friend, and he ought to be as concerned as James.

“What’s up?” He asked, hoping he sounded calm and caring.

“See him limping?” James said, still watching Sirius walk out of the hall. Remus looked. He had the same arrogant swagger as usual, his hair swishing and his shoulders back - but... yes, Remus thought James was right. He looked a little unsteady on his feet.

“Something happen at practice?” Remus frowned.

“No.” James shook his head, “Been like that since yesterday.”

Remus thought back, scanning his memories - Sirius had been sitting down most of the time Remus had seen him, and even then, Remus hadn’t exactly been looking in great detail. In fact, he had been trying to do the complete opposite. His guilt took on a new dimension.

“You think his mum did something?” He asked, his stomach churning.

“I *know* she did.” James replied, fiercely. He was looking at the Slytherin table, now. “He tried to hide it in the changing rooms, but I caught him in the showers and... Merlin, Moony, if you saw...”

“What?”

James shook his head, as if he wished he could shake out the image.

“She’s butchered him.”

A chill ran through Remus that was ten times more effective than a cold shower. All of a sudden he was eleven again, and back in the quidditch changing room after he and Sirius had crashed their brooms. Eleven-year-old Sirius whispered ‘I’ve got scars...’ and lifted his trouser leg to show the long, straight silver marks. At the time Remus had only thought how different they were from his

own scars - how neat and uniform, as if they had been done with a razor blade. Later, Sirius had described the scars as a discipline technique, but they had never discussed it again.

“Is he ok?” Remus asked, shakily, no longer wanting his toast.

“He says he is.” James replied, “But he won’t... he won’t talk about it, or say anything. Ugh, I shouldn’t have brought up Regulus like that. He’s just so bloody *stubborn*.”

“What can we do?” Remus worried, “He can’t go back there, it’s not right. Can your family do something?”

“They tried, last summer,” James said, sadly, “But no joy. If I can get him to go to someone; Dumbledore, or even Madam Pomfrey, if they could *see* what that old bitch does... maybe we can get him out.”

“He won’t, though.” Remus sighed. Sirius would never show weakness like that.

“Can you try, Moony?” James asked, desperately, “He won’t talk to me, but sometimes you can sort of shock him into it.”

“Me?!”

“Yeah, y’know, I think he listens to you, sometimes. He always wants to impress you.”

Oh why did James have to say a thing like that?

They went to Transfiguration, and found Sirius already there, studiously ignoring them. It was the same story for the rest of the day, even at lunchtime, Sirius engaged Mary and Marlene in conversation before James or Remus could get a word in. He kept them entertained with silly impressions of Peter and Desdemona, so that they were hysterical with laughter. James sat by, grim faced, his expression not flickering once.

They weren’t able to trap Sirius alone until well after dinner. Peter was once again conspicuously absent, and Remus found that he and Lily were off the rota for patrol that evening.

They caught Sirius exiting the bathroom, and James stood in front of the door, so he couldn’t escape into the common room. Remus decided to go for the direct approach.

“Heard you had a shit summer.” He said, looking Sirius in the eye. It was easier, if you were ready for it. Sirius snorted,

“What’s James been saying?”

“That you’re hurt, but you’re too much of a stuck-up git to admit it.”

“I’m not *hurt*.” Sirius growled, disgusted. “It’s healing.”

“This morning you were bleeding!” James said, angrily, clearly at his wits end.

“What?!” Remus said, alarmed, “God, Sirius, you have to go to Madam Pomfrey!”

“And have the whole school know how my mother likes to amuse herself?! No thanks.”

“Yeah, because Madam Pomfrey tells the whole school everything...” Remus said, raising a sarcastic eyebrow. “Let me see.”

“No! Godric, you’re worse than Potter!”

“Come on, I’ve shown you mine.” Remus caught his eye again and held it.

He saw Sirius calculating, weighing up the benefits, then slowly relenting.

“I don’t want James to see.” He said, looking down, embarrassed.

Remus turned and looked at James, whose shoulders slumped a bit with disappointment. Still, stoic as ever, he nodded and promptly left the room. Remus felt very vulnerable, now, being alone with Sirius. He pushed all selfish thoughts aside and tried to concentrate on helping his best friend.

“C’mon then,” he nodded at Sirius, “Let’s see, one victim to another.” He’d meant that as a bit of a dark joke, but realised at once that it had been the wrong thing to say. He cursed himself and resolved to shut up unless he had something helpful to say.

Sirius sat on the nearest bed, which happened to be Remus’s, and pulled up his trouser leg. Remus had to hold back a gasp of horror. James had used exactly the right word - butchered. These marks were not neat and ordered, as the earlier scars had been. They were vicious, cross-crossed, varying in depth and severity. The entire backs of his calves looked as though someone had sliced at them with a surgeon’s scalpel.

“Lacero?” Remus asked, trying to keep his face blank. Sirius flinched slightly at the word, but nodded. “Bitch.” Remus said. Sirius laughed.

“Goes all the way up.” He said.

“Shit.” Remus breathed. He backed away, then went to his bedside table to rummage around, “I’ve got something that’ll stop it hurting.”

“It doesn’t--”

“Don’t lie,” Remus commanded, pulling out his jar of murtlap essence, “I know pain.”

Sirius accepted this. Remus returned and handed him the jar. Sirius looked at it, then at Remus, expectantly.

“You rub it on.” Remus said. he shook the jar, impatiently, “Come on, I’m not doing it for you, I’m not your house elf.”

He thought he’d been doing pretty well, but it would all come crumbling down if he had to *touch* Sirius, even somewhere as innocent as his calves. Sirius grinned and took the murtlap essence. He scooped out a liberal dollop with his long fingers, and smeared some onto his leg. Remus saw from the look in his face that it had worked at once; his features relaxed, some of the sharpness left his eyes. He must have really been in pain.

“Bloody hell, you’re amazing, Moony!” Sirius said, cheering up as he continued to apply the essence. Remus blushed and shrugged,

“It’s just magic, not like I discovered the stuff.”

“Yeah, but still...” Sirius stood up now, and began to unbutton his trousers so that he could do the rest of the cuts. Remus practically leapt back, and scrambled towards the door, babbling,

“I’ll um... I’ll give you some privacy... got to go anyway... homework...” his voice was much

higher than he wanted it to be.

He practically ran down the stairs and bumped straight into James.

“Is he ok?!”

“Yeah, yeah... I gave him something for it. Just give him a minute, I think he’ll come down.”

“Brilliant, thanks Remus.”

“I didn’t talk to him about going to a teacher or anyone...”

“Yeah, but he’s talking to *us*, now,” James beamed. “Seriously, thanks, Moony, you’re a legend! We’re going to pay you back... I’m not supposed to say anything about it yet, but... well, I *promise* we’re going to!”

With that, James clapped him on the shoulder, then ran up the stairs to see Sirius. Remus sank into a nearby armchair, and decided to reassess a few things. He had to get away, in case they came back down. He left the common room and went to the library, where he spent the rest of the evening painstakingly studying the goblin rebellions. It was OWLs this year, after all, and he couldn’t allow his libido to wreck everything he’d been working for.

It was almost curfew by the time he felt ready to leave. His eyes itched and his back ached, and he was in a bad mood – but at least he wasn’t thinking about Sirius any more. Well. Not really.

He left the library and walked quickly up the dark corridors the Gryffindor Tower. He was at least halfway there when he heard an odd sort of noise – like a whimper – at the end of the Charms hallway. Sighing to himself, he went to investigate. Lily would have his guts for garters if he didn’t. It was as he suspected. Two Slytherins had cornered a Ravenclaw first year, and were tormenting him. They had him in a binding curse – Remus had been in that position plenty of times.

“*Expelliarmus*,” he called out, and the two Slytherin’s wands flew into his hands. They turned, one dark haired, one fair. Barty Crouch and Regulus Black. “Oh, *you* two...” Remus yawned, leaning casually against the wall.

The Ravenclaw scurried off, squeaking a quick ‘thank you!’ to Remus as he did.

“Loony Lupin!” Barty smirked. He had a horrible smile, as if he had never really known joy, or happiness.

“Watch your tongue, Crouch,” Remus hissed, then shot a curse at him.

At once, Barty’s tongue began to swell up, turning purple as it did so. He clutched at it, desperately, but it was one of James’s engorgement charms, and could not be stopped. “Better get to the hospital wing,” Remus smiled, pleasantly. “I’ll send your wands to your Head of House, let him know you were out of bounds...”

“How dare you!” Regulus seethed, marching over to Remus. He was much shorter – almost the same height as Sirius, but it didn’t stop him squaring up to the fifth year. The summer had clearly treated Regulus poorly too – he was paler than ever, his eyes dark and hollow. “Filthy half-blood scum! You might be a prefect, but you’re still just a cowardly, dirty---“

“Cowardly, am I?!” Remus saw red, and dropped both wands, instead using his hands to ram Regulus up against the wall by his neck.

The younger boy's head hit the brick wall, and he blinked, genuine terror showing in his face. Remus didn't care; in fact, it was perfect. "I may be a half-blood," Remus hissed, menacingly, "But at least I don't stand by and watch my family get cut to shreds!"

Regulus's eyes widened, and a terrible, haunted look came over him.

"I *told* him to stop pushing her, but he wouldn't listen!" he whispered, "I couldn't stop her..."

Disgusted, Remus let go. Barty was still choking, further down the hall.

"You're a coward, Regulus Black." Remus said, very quietly, "Don't ever forget it."

He spat at Regulus's feet, and walked away.

Chapter End Notes

The memory Remus references from their first year is in Chapter 9: Scars.

Fifth Year: The Surprise

Chapter Summary

WARNINGS:

- Smoking/casual mention of drug use
- Sexuality - Remus is working through a lot of stuff in this chapter, mostly relatively innocent puberty related stuff, but parts are a bit more detailed with regards to his sexuality, and some people might find it uncomfortable. To help you avoid this, I have highlighted two sentences in bold - 'Sirius was quite enough to contend with.' and 'It had been a very trying three weeks.' You should stop reading at the first sentence, and it's 'safe' to resume from the second sentence.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

So inviting - so enticing to play the part

I could play the wild mutation

as a rock 'n' roll star

I could do with the money (y'know that I could...)

I'm so wiped out with things as they are (y'know that I should...)

I'd send my photograph to my honey

- and I'd come on like a regular superstar.

Saturday 20th September 1975

Over the next three weeks, Remus managed to fall into a somewhat more comfortable routine as he learnt to navigate his newfound feelings. Once upon a time he might have simply tried to avoid Sirius; to withdraw and hide in the library, or one of his little corners. But he had learnt that this never worked in the end, especially when you shared a bedroom. And at any rate, he was far too big for most of his old cubby holes now.

So he simply tried to cope, and in trying, found that he could. Not that it was easy, exactly - but he had so much else to worry about. On top of prefect duties, which already had Remus up and down the castle for patrol duties and meetings, it was an important year for their studies.

With OWLs coming up, the teachers were loading them up with more work than ever - and there had been a noticeable shift in the syllabus. In Transfiguration they were learning concealment; in Charms they practiced disarming; Potions was largely focussed on identifying and counteracting poisons; and Defence Against the Dark Arts seemed to be nothing but drill after drill of attack and defence spells. They were training for war, and everyone knew it.

Care of Magical Creatures was a grim affair. Professor Kettleburn was a grumpy, barking old man with half his limbs missing and an eye patch. He didn't bring anything in for them to look at, or tell

them stories of his encounters with fantastical beasts - he preferred to recount how he had got all of his various injuries, and it was always horrible.

Remus tried to spin this in a positive way - at least without Ferox there was one less distraction. There was no *way* he was going to develop a crush on crusty old Kettleburn. **Sirius was quite enough to contend with.**

Though he managed to simply smile through his feelings most of the time, they seemed to surface at the most inopportune moments. He'd be reading a book, and there it was. Or completely alone in the library, and a memory would pop up, stirring up his insides. It left him often shaken, too hot, and confused. If *this* had been how James and Mary and Marlene and Peter and everyone involved in the stupid snogging business had been feeling for the past two years, then Remus simply didn't know how any of them had got anything done. It seemed his mind and body were constantly at war.

He wasn't stupid; he knew he was something of a late bloomer where that sort of thing was concerned. The summer after he'd turned thirteen, Matron had called him into her office and asked him in the vaguest terms possible how much he knew about 'marital relations'. He wasn't very sure how much he *ought* to know, and didn't want to look stupid, so he just said he knew 'everything'. She nodded and told him to ask a male member of staff if he had any questions. Of course, he never had. They also once had a talk from the local vicar about the sanctity of marriage and the sinful nature of 'acting on base urges' - but Remus had been so mortified that he had blocked most of that out.

'Base urges'. It wasn't something you were *supposed* to talk about seriously - at least not with other boys, he knew that much. Jokes were ok; at least you were in safe territory if you just teased each other. But you certainly couldn't ask questions.

The other marauders were ahead of him; some nights close to the full moon he had caught the scent of their lust, had heard their quiet aching moments of frustration and shame as they fumbled under the bedsheets in the dark. It just embarrassed him. Of course, Remus *did*, of course he *had* ... but that just felt like maintenance, with no more meaning assigned to it than brushing his teeth.

Ever since this past summer, though, things in that department had changed. Become more urgent. As if snogging Grant had activated him in some way; unleashed a great flood of... *feelings*. Remus rarely thought about anything else, he was constantly on edge. For once, he was grateful for the billowing black robes they were required to wear at Hogwarts, but even then he often found himself having to stay seated longer than everyone else sometimes, trying to think neutral thoughts. Once he had to cover his lap with a particularly heavy book, simply because McGonagall said 'wand work' too many times.

He felt changed on the inside; it was present in every moment - whether he was alone or in company. And Sirius. *Why* did it have to be Sirius?

Ok, he *knew* why. It was the way his thin white school shirt hung off his back, the way his hair fell in his eyes so that he had to push it back, even though he never, ever tucked it behind his ear. His hands. His fucking eyes...

It had been a very trying three weeks.

Remus was grateful that this first full moon of the term had fallen on a weekend. It meant that he could sleep in and lounge around peacefully waiting for nightfall, rather than sitting through hours of lessons, bones aching on hard wooden seats. Saturday was also quidditch practice day (actually, ever since James became captain, quidditch practice was almost every day), leaving Remus

completely, blissfully undisturbed.

He had slept in most of the morning, then wandered downstairs for lunch, before returning to the quiet of an empty bedroom. He read his book for a while, but feeling headachy and restless soon gave up. He wished the moon would hurry up and come, so he could get it over with. Waiting for it was the worst part. He closed his eyes, stretching out, then decided he was sick of lying down. He climbed off his bed, and went to sit on the windowsill with a packet of cigarettes. The last he had from the summer, given to him by Grant as a leaving gift.

Grant. If Grant was here, at Hogwarts, would Remus feel the same about Sirius? Probably, he sighed to himself. And Grant was so canny at that sort of thing he'd work it out right away. Maybe he would have some advice. If only he could call him, or even write a letter - but he was only allowed to send owls to Matron, and what if she read it?! Remus wished he had the compact mirrors James and Sirius had. Though how on earth he would explain them to Grant he had no idea.

He finished his first cigarette and started on another. It was soothing. Weed was better; he'd had some after his last full moon, but he hadn't seen anyone at Hogwarts smoking it. He was on the outs with the smoking set anyway, as he was no longer supplying. The past summer's distractions had cost him in more ways than one.

Evening was drawing in, and Remus's stomach began to rumble. He tried to eat light on full moons, anticipating the pain which sometimes made him sick. In the days afterwards, he would be ravenous, and could easily manage three or four plates per meal. He was just about to get up and go down, when the door opened.

Peter, James and Sirius walked in, with curious looks on their faces. James looked very serious and quite cautious, as if he had to deliver some news and wasn't sure how Remus would take it. Remus knew it couldn't be bad news, though, because Sirius was grinning from ear to ear, showing every one of his perfect, pearly white teeth. Peter was wringing his hands, as usual, but he too had a small, wicked smile - the look he had when they were in the middle of a particularly devious prank.

"Oh god," Remus said, before James could speak, "What now? Why aren't you at quidditch?"

"No quidditch today!" Sirius said, still grinning like a maniac. The energy coming off him was electric, burning hot - he was clearly extremely excited about something.

"Where have you been, then?" Remus asked, choosing to look at James, instead, to keep his voice level.

"We've been practicing something else!" Peter burst out, biting his bottom lip.

Remus leaned back on the windowsill and looked at James again, raising a questioning eyebrow. James swallowed, his adam's apple bobbing, then cleared his throat,

"Moony," he said, "You may remember we had an idea, in third year..."

"You have ideas all the time, Potter, be specific," Remus said, irritably, lighting his third cigarette. His shoulders hurt, and his neck. He wasn't in the mood for games on a full moon, they should know this by now.

"The... to help you with the... I know you said we shouldn't, um..." James ran his hand through his hair, "But we'd already got so far with it, and... um... look, I'm sorry, we're sorry... but..."

"Spit it out!" Remus sighed, exhaling smoke. James looked panicked. He glanced at Sirius, then

looked at his feet and mumbled,

“ *We’ve become animagus’ ...*”

“What?!”

“Oh for Merlin’s sake!” Sirius said, stepping forward, “Look, Remus!”

And with that, Sirius promptly transformed into a very large black dog, and Remus fell off the window ledge in shock.

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'Star' by David Bowie, from 'The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars'.

The boys becoming animagus' was first discussed in the chapter 'Third Year: Philomena Pettigrew'.

Fifth Year: Moony & Co.

The dog - Sirius the dog - barked twice and wagged its tail playfully as Remus picked himself up off the floor. He looked at James and Peter, who were both smiling sheepishly. He looked at the dog again, and it transformed back into Sirius, standing before him with the same mad grin.

"You did it." Remus said, tonelessly, "I can't believe you bloody did it." He sat down again, feeling a bit wobbly.

"Are you angry with us?" James asked, his eyes huge and earnest.

"Can you all do it?"

Peter and James looked at each other, then nodded. Remus breathed in, his chest tight. "Go on then," he whispered, "Show me."

At once, James and Peter transformed into a huge, regal stag, and a fat brown rat. James's antlers scraped the low ceiling of their room, so that he had to bow his head slightly. Sirius laughed,

"We couldn't choose what we turned into," he explained. "Otherwise Peter probably would have picked something else..."

"Oi!" Peter said, transforming back, "Rats are highly intelligent creatures, I looked it up."

"Shame you're not." Sirius replied.

"Not everyone wants to be a big slobbering mutt," James transformed back too, and punched Sirius on the shoulder,

"All right, Bambi, calm down," Sirius smirked, ruffling Peter's hair, "Just having a laugh, aren't we, mate?"

Peter smiled back. He did look pretty happy. All of them did. Remus was still speechless. He watched them all as if they were strangers. Had they really done this - some of the most difficult magic, which required skill, concentration and - above all - *patience* , just for him?

"Remus?" James asked, looking serious again, "You are angry aren't you?"

"I..." Remus frowned, then shook his head, "No, no, not angry... I just..." He rubbed the back of his head, closing his eyes, "I knew you'd do it anyway, I knew you'd try, at least. You never listen to me."

"We're sorry." James said, forlorn. Even Sirius had stopped bouncing about.

"No, don't be sorry!" Remus said, quickly, opening his eyes, "What you've done is amazing... you lot are amazing. I just... I don't know what to say."

He cursed himself for not being able to thank them properly - for feeling everything so strongly, but being unable to put any of it into words. What was the point of all that reading if it didn't give you the words when you needed them?

He looked up again to find Sirius watching him - his smile was calmer now, and the light of understanding shone in his eyes. Remus's heart skipped a beat.

“Thank you.” He said, quietly, just to Sirius.

“Anything for our Moony!” Sirius grinned again, and suddenly everything was back to normal, and the dorm room was just their dorm room, and these incredible people were just his friends. “Come on,” Sirius said, brightly, addressing all of them, “Let’s go down for dinner. We’ve got a long night ahead of us!”

“Tonight?!” Remus said, surprised, “You want to try it tonight?!”

Of course, he thought, *this is why they chose the very last moment to reveal themselves.*

“No time like the present,” James smiled.

“You can’t want to spend another night alone in that horrid shack when you don’t have to, Remus?” Peter said, earnestly.

Remus thought about this as he followed the others down the many stairs and corridors to the Great Hall. He did not like being alone, right before the moon or right after it. He assumed the wolf didn’t like being alone either, judging by the pain it caused him. But he had *always* done it alone. It had never been a question before.

He didn’t speak at all through dinner, picking at his plate listlessly. Sirius nudged him every now and then, and Remus threw him a smile, but went back to playing with his roast potatoes.

“Remus, you’re not eating,” Marlene said, concerned, “That’s *really* not like you.”

“Mm,” he replied, putting his fork down, “I don’t feel well. I think I’ll go to the hospital wing.”

“Oh no, again?” Marlene tilted her head in sympathy, “You poor thing.”

Remus shrugged and got up to leave. The marauders got up too and followed him out.

“How are you going to do it?” He asked, as he walked, not daring to look at any of them.

“Pete’s small, he can get us in,” James said, eagerly, “Then we’ll use the cloak - it’s a doddle to fit under now we can change.”

“Ok,” Remus nodded, working it out, “Ok, if you can sneak in behind Pomfrey... she puts a locking charm on the door, otherwise.”

“Great,” Peter nodded, enthusiastically, “We’ll do it, Remus, we will!”

Outside the hospital wing, he turned and looked at them all. It helped to be tall, at times like this.

“You know I might kill you all.”

They looked back at him without wavering. Sirius straightened his back,

“You won’t.”

Remus sighed.

“Ok. See you in an hour or so, then.” And with that he entered the infirmary, without looking back. His heart was hammering in his chest - part excitement, part terror.

It was dangerous; it was so, *so* dangerous that his head hurt. But he had told them ‘no’ once before,

and this was the result. He could only hope that they were quick enough and clever enough to escape, if things went wrong. And if they couldn't escape... he hoped that at least one of them would be brave enough to do what was necessary to ensure the three of them survived, even if it mean he wouldn't.

* * *

"You'll be all right, dear?" Madam Pomfrey asked, surveying him with worried eyes. "I know the first night is a bad one..."

"It's ok, really." Remus said, sitting down on his little cot, as usual. "Don't worry about me, I'll see you in the morning."

"The very crack of dawn," the medi-witch promised. She gave him a quick kiss on the forehead before bustling out of the room. Remus breathed in deeply and looked around.

"Are you there?" He breathed into the empty room.

James appeared suddenly, pulling back the cloak. Sirius and Peter quickly followed, transforming back from their animagus forms.

"I don't think I'll ever get used to that," Remus blinked. he bit his lip nervously and tried to smile, gesturing at the dingy room, "Welcome to the Shrieking Shack..."

"Moony," James said, looking deeply troubled as he took in the surroundings, "It's horrible."

"It's ok. It's better than a cage."

"It *is* a cage," Sirius said, sounding fierce.

"When will it happen?" Peter asked, suddenly, standing behind the other two.

Remus rolled his shoulders carefully to see how the ache was coming along.

"Not long," he said, flatly, "Fifteen minutes, maybe."

There were quiet for a bit. When Remus could feel his blood begin to boil, and that tell-tale tingling in his muscles, he suddenly panicked, "No one's ever seen it happen before." He said, staring at them all helplessly, "I don't think... it's really, really ugly."

"It's ok, Remus," James said, soothingly, "We know what to expect."

"I might scream... I *will* scream."

"It's fine." Sirius promised.

"You've got your wands?"

"Yep," they all withdrew them to show him.

"Good," he nodded, looking at the floorboards. His back hurt, he could feel every vertebra pushing against the skin. "If I attack... if you can't control me... you're going to have to..." he faltered. It was starting. "Change," he shouted, curling up on the bed, facing the wall, "quickly!"

His nerve endings caught fire, and the transformation began. *It hurts*, his mind babbled, like a whining child, *it hurts it hurts it hurts...* he started to lose his mind in the agony, aware someone

was screaming, until he wasn't Remus anymore, and the screaming was a long, dark howl of anguish.

He finally rolled over, his body new and strong and powerful... he sniffed. He knew this place - his prison. He wanted to be free, he wanted to get out and run and hunt and kill... he was so hungry, so restless. He was about to howl again, run at the windows or scratch at the door. He sniffed the air. He was not alone.

The wolf turned its eyes on the three animals locked in with it. It growled, jumped down from the bed. It snapped his jaws, and stood tall, raising its tail to show dominance. The black one growled to, sniffing at the wolf. It stepped forward and the wolf snarled, still unsure. The black one lay down at the wolf's feet. It rolled over and showed its belly. Friend. The wolf, knowing itself to be the leader now, stopped growling. He recognised the scent of them; knew they meant no harm.

This was his pack - and he was no longer alone.

* * *

Remus woke up choking and spluttering as he came back into his body. It was dark and dusty, like always, and his bones were still sore and tired, and his head still throbbed. But there was no blood; at least he couldn't smell it - couldn't taste it - and the pain was passing quickly, like water down a drain.

"Moony?" Sirius's voice broke in, familiar and comforting. "Here,"

Remus felt hot with shame as Sirius handed him a blanket to cover himself.

"Thanks," he croaked, wrapping it around himself. He squinted as his vision unblurred, the shapes of his three friends swimming slowly into view, "Everyone ok?"

"Fine," Sirius beamed, "Better than fine! It *worked*, Moony!"

"Here, c'mon," James reached down and helped Remus to his feet, then supported him back over to the little bed. Remus still felt weak, as usual, but that was all. No cuts, no scratches - he had not hurt himself at all.

He pulled his blanket tighter around his body and looked up at his three best friends - the dearest people in the world. His eyes filled with tears and he looked down, quickly, embarrassed.

"Are you ok?" Sirius asked, sounding worried, "Does it still hurt?"

"No," Remus shook his head, smiling, "I'm just being silly." He wiped his eyes and looked at them again. James looked as regal and proud as ever, his glasses slightly askew, dark rings under his eyes, but smiling nonetheless. Peter was pink, flushed with excitement, and Sirius was utterly perfect, glowing as if he'd just been handed the quidditch cup. Remus felt very frail and pathetic, all skinny and naked on the bed beside these heroes. "Was it bad?" He asked, nervously, "The transformation?"

"It was pretty awful." James said, honestly. The others nodded.

"You're so brave, Remus." Peter burst out.

"But afterwards," Sirius said, eager to remember, "Afterwards it was amazing - you weren't sure at first, but then I--"

“You submitted to me.” Remus said, “I remember.”

“I thought you couldn’t remember anything that happened?” James asked, cocking his head.

“I can’t, usually,” Remus frowned, “But last night was different... I remember it all. I wasn’t me, exactly, but I wasn’t *not* me either. Does that make sense?”

“No,” Sirius laughed. Remus laughed too. “You lot better get under the cloak. Madam Pomfrey’s on her way. Could, er... someone pass me my clothes?”

Sirius was the last to hide under the cloak, he was alive with joy, and kept transforming back and forth, unable to stay still. When they absolutely had to go, he squeezed Remus’s shoulder gently, one last time,

“Didn’t I tell you, Moony? Didn’t I tell you?!” He whispered, feverishly.

“You did,” Remus smiled, weakly. He lowered his voice, so that no one else could hear him, and looked at Sirius carefully, “Was it scary? Was *I* scary?” He had no idea what he looked like in wolf form.

Sirius’s expression did not flicker.

“No.” He said, firmly. “You were beautiful.”

Fifth Year: Beautiful

Chapter Summary

CW for brief mention of homophobic violence.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Of course, Madam Pomfrey was completely confounded by Remus's blemish-free night in the shack.

"Amazing!" She kept repeating, "Completely amazing..."

Remus fobbed her off with some mad theory that he was 'maturing', and that must account for it. She didn't seem convinced, but the sweet nurse was just so pleased to find him unharmed that she didn't ask any questions about it. She kept him in the infirmary to sleep through Sunday, but by midday he felt as alert and energetic as he did when the moon was waning.

"I've no reason to keep you here," Madam Pomfrey smiled, still not quite believing it. "I don't believe in cluttering up my ward with healthy patients."

Remus practically skipped back to Gryffindor tower, taking the stairs two steps at a time. He was unsurprised to find the marauders all in bed still, though James and Peter were showing signs of life.

"All right, Moony?" James smiled sleepily, pulling back his bed curtains at the sound of the dormitory door.

"All right," Remus whispered back, not wanting to wake Sirius. He hated having his sleep interrupted at the best of times, and today Remus really felt he deserved a lie in. Plus, '*you were beautiful*' had been ringing in Remus's ears all day, and he wasn't sure yet how he would ever be able to speak to Sirius again.

"Pomfrey say anything?"

"Nah, she can't work out what she did differently. We got away with it."

"Great!" James yawned, "We'll have to get some 'pepper up' pills or something for next time - it's a Monday."

"You don't have to do it every month..."

"Shuddup, Moony," Peter called out, groggily, "We'll do whatever we like."

Remus smiled to himself, collected his books and crept down to the common room so as not to disturb them any further.

"Remus!" Marlene cried, "Thank goodness, I am so stuck on this stupid History question..."

“Which one did you pick?” Remus settled down at a desk with the girls. “Goblin rebellion?”

“Troll uprising.” Marlene sighed mournfully. “I thought it would be easier.”

“Mmm,” Remus replied, sifting through his notes to see what he had on the troll uprising. He found trolls pretty dull, himself, but he had dutifully taken down everything Professor Binns had said. Even though Sirius had been passing notes all the way through that lesson.

Beautiful. *Beautiful*. What did that mean? It was a good thing, obviously. A word that could only ever be positive. But Sirius had said it. Worse, he had said it about Remus’s wolf form. So, it might mean any number of things – Remus had created a shortlist in his head.

For example, ‘you were beautiful’ might mean:

1. “You *were* beautiful last night, as a wolf, but you are *not* beautiful this morning as a human.”
2. “You were beautiful last night *because* I was a dog, and dogs are in a good position to judge canine beauty.”
3. “I am *telling* you that you were beautiful, even though it isn’t true, because I don’t want to hurt your feelings.”
4. “I think you *are* beautiful all the time and would very much like to snog you.”

Remus was willing to admit that option 4 was the least likely. He finally found the notes and passed them to Marlene.

“Skim through and let me know if you get stuck. Some of it’s a bit confusing, but I’ve got some good tricks for remembering the key dates.”

“You’re a lifesaver, Remus!” Marlene gushed, looking relieved.

“At least you’ve finished your Transfiguration essay,” Mary frowned, looking just as frazzled as Marlene. “I’m so behind, I’m going to be up all night.”

“Do you need a hand?” Remus asked, reaching for his own Transfiguration homework, which just needed a quick proof-read before it was ready to hand in.

“Oh, no thank you...” Mary blushed, looking down, “Umm... Sirius promised to help, actually. You know, because he’s really good at Transfiguration.”

Marlene giggled,

“*And* he’s asked her to go to Hogsmeade with him...”

“Oh, has he?” Remus asked, his mouth suddenly very dry.

“Yeah,” Mary grinned, looking very pleased with herself. Remus couldn’t blame her. Lucky cow. “I know I dumped him before,” Mary said, in a hushed tone, “But we were just kids then. He’s *so* much more mature now.”

Lily gave a sarcastic snort, but didn’t look up from her own work. Remus just smiled and nodded, looking down at his Charms textbook. He wasn’t much in the mood for homework now. Marlene and Mary continued to giggle and whisper about Sirius.

Remus gave himself a stern telling off. It wasn’t fair to feel the way he did – not fair to Mary, and not fair to Sirius. In fact, it was incredibly selfish. Sirius hadn’t spurned him, or set out to hurt him deliberately. Quite the opposite – Sirius had gone out of his way to make Remus feel safe and

comfortable in his own skin. It was horribly ungrateful of Remus to get upset over a stupid thing like this.

Really, it was none of his business *who* Sirius went to Hogsmeade with. Remus himself had never had any interest in Mary Macdonald, so the churning, sick feeling in his stomach was completely out of place. And his friends were *allowed* to have girlfriends, if they wanted. It was *normal*. Sirius deserved a bit of normality, after the summer he'd had.

He thought about it all evening, and into the next day. About Mary, and Sirius, and 'you were beautiful'... Would Sirius tell Mary she was beautiful? She *was* beautiful, it would be a fair statement – not just her soft curves and chocolate brown eyes, but the spatter of freckles on her nose, her warm brown skin – which had never been spotty, like every other teen in their year, but glowed like mahogany. Her laughter, her humour, her quick wit. She was a good match for Sirius.

The thing was, Remus decided, if a *boy* told a *girl* she was beautiful, there could really be no doubts about what his intentions were. Boys telling other boys they were beautiful was a bit blurrier – especially when neither party had all of the information.

After all, Remus repeatedly told himself, Sirius had no idea what he had been up to all summer. As far as Sirius knew – as far as anyone at Hogwarts knew, Remus was just as interested in girls as every other boy his age. So it could easily be read as a completely platonic, innocuous compliment. On the other hand, a small, wheedling voice would whisper, Sirius had *always* known Remus better than Remus knew himself. He had always been able to suss him out – the reading problem, the lycanthropy – why not this too? Was it so terrible to hope?

* * *

Saturday 4th October 1975

After a week of restless nights, Remus was desperate for someone to talk to. And this time there was truly no one he *could* talk to. Everyone knew slightly different shades of Remus, based on the secrets they were aware of. The marauders knew he was a werewolf – but only Sirius knew about his struggles with reading. Lily knew about the reading, but not about the werewolf problem. Mary and Marlene knew least of all, and he liked it that way.

There was only one person in all the world who knew about his newest secret – and that person was nearly impossible to get in touch with. However, Remus was more than just a werewolf with reading problems and a gargantuan crush on his best friend. Above all things, he was a marauder; and nothing was impossible to a marauder.

Last year, Mary had told him there was an old muggle phone box on the outskirts of Hogsmeade which was still in service. All he needed to do was get to it without anyone asking where he was going, and make sure Grant was waiting on the other end, back in Essex.

The first part was easy – Sirius and Peter would both be occupied on the next Hogsmeade weekend with their respective dates. James, though he had asked Lily out several times already this term, would be at a loose end, but was much less nosey than Sirius. Remus thought he could get away from him without much effort.

Getting a message to St Edmund's was much more difficult, and in the end Remus settled for owling Matron. He wrote her a quick note explaining that he would not be back for Christmas – this was completely redundant, as so far he had not spent one Christmas at St Edmund's since he was eleven, but it served his purposes. He enclosed a second envelope, addressed to Grant Chapman, with an even briefer note inside:

'Saturday 4th Oct. Phone box on Station Approach. 12pm.'

After that, Remus just had to hope for the best.

Hogsmeade weekend arrived, and Remus had somewhat forgotten that as a prefect, he had certain duties to perform, which slowed him down a great deal. He and Lily had to check all of the third year's names off their list of students who had the correct permission slips, then lead them all down to the village.

Luckily, James soon grew bored of following Remus down, bringing up the rear of a long line of excitable thirteen year olds, and he disappeared off to look at the latest quidditch supplies. In the end, Remus did not make it to Hogsmeade until half past twelve, so when Lily was finally satisfied they had shepherded every last third year, he had to run as fast as he could to the edge of town, praying nobody noticed him.

Hogsmeade was the only village for miles and miles around, and there was only one path which lead to and from it. Remus suspected this road was seldom used, as wizards had so many other means of travel. The tall, red phone box looked very strange, then, standing by itself surrounded by lush green Scottish hillsides. Remus thanked his lucky stars it was unoccupied – he had been worried he'd arrive to find some muggleborn student already in there, tying up the line. But no, he was quite alone. He opened the door and stepped inside, punching in the number as quickly as possible.

It only rang twice, before a crackly voice answered on the other end.

"Hjhfrd..." it seemed to say.

"Hello... hello, can you hear me?" Remus said, loudly into the receiver.

"Wotcher, Remus," Grant's voice returned, slightly tinny, but much clearer, and as cheeky and cheerful as ever. Remus felt at ease for the first time in weeks. "Cor, been waiting an hour in this bloody box."

"Sorry," Remus said, "Took longer than I thought to get away. You got my message, then?"

"I did. Very flattered, I must say. Missin' me, are ya?"

"Of course." Remus said, quickly – and he realised he meant it. Sirius had been a distraction of epic proportions, but he had to admit that he'd felt a little bit lonely without Grant around. "How are you?"

"Same old. How's school?"

"Fine, fine..."

"What's up?"

"Um... I wanted to ask you something."

"Go for it."

"Well... you know that day when we were... um, early in the summer, when we were sitting outside, and you... you--"

"Snogged ya face off?"

Remus felt himself blushing hard against the cold plastic receiver.

“Yeah. Er... well, I wanted to ask. Um. How did you... *know*?”

“Oh gawd,” Grant sighed heavily, “Who is it?”

“What do you--”

“You fancy someone, right? Some posh boy at school? And you wan’ me to tell you what signs to look out for, see if he fancies you back.”

Remus blinked. That was pretty much exactly what he wanted. “Well,” Grant said, “Sorry to let ya down, me ol’ duck, but I’ve got nuffin’ for ya. Nine times out of ten they *don’t* fancy you back, so don’t get your hopes up. Eight times out of ten they’ll beat the living daylights out of ya if you try it on. Hope ‘e’s not on the rugby team, or whatever it is you toffs do.”

“No. And I don’t think he would... he wouldn’t... he’s my friend.” Remus ended, lamely.

“‘e ever done anything to make you think he’s one of us?”

One of us.

“Erm... not exactly.”

“‘e got a girlfriend? Or is it a boys only school? Always fancied goin’ to one of them.”

“There are girls,” Remus sighed. “And yeah, he’s um... well actually he’s gone out with a girl today.”

“Ah, well it don’t sound like your luck’s in, mate. I mean, he *might* go both ways, but I dunno how likely that is, to be honest.”

“Yeah,” Remus sighed. *He called me beautiful*, he wanted to say. *Surely he couldn’t be so cruel as to say a thing like that and not mean it?*

Through the silence that followed, Grant laughed softly on the other end of the phone,

“Oh Remus, love. Real stunner, is ‘e?”

“I dunno what to do.” Remus replied, closing his eyes and leaning hopelessly back against the booth.

“Nuffin’ you can do. It won’t last forever, don’ worry. You’ll move on – just look after yourself.”

“Thanks.”

“Anytime. You’re back next summer, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Christmas?”

“Probably not.”

“Shame. Crap here by myself. Had to play footie yesterday.”

“I thought you hated football.”

“Nah, jus’ told you that so you’d like me.”

Remus laughed.

Though the phone call had not taught Remus anything he hadn’t already known, he felt a lot better for it. He headed back into Hogsmeade with a spring in his step, looking forward to a visit to Honeyduke’s before finding his friends in the Three Broomsticks. Grant was quite right – of *course* Sirius was a no go. Eventually Remus’s feelings towards him would cool off.

This new, positive outlook did not last long. Remus had no sooner set foot back in Hogsmeade, when Severus Snape appeared, slinking out from an alleyway between two cottages.

“Lupin.” He said, coldly. He looked worryingly calm and collected, his beady black eyes fixed on Remus.

At fifteen, Snape was even more awkward looking than he had been at eleven. Adolescence had ravaged him; his limbs had grown gangly, his nose even more hooked, and he had a terrible case of acne, which put Remus in mind of their itching powder prank in first year.

“All right, Snivellus?” Remus huffed, walking past, “Foraging in other people’s bins, are you?”

Severus walked alongside him, smirking.

“What were you doing, leaving Hogsmeade?”

“None of your business, creep.”

“You were gone for almost an hour.”

“Did you follow me?!”

“You’re up to something.”

“Get lost, or I’ll give you detention.”

“It’s a complete joke that you got made prefect.” Severus said, quite out of the blue. Snape had not been made a prefect for Slytherin. “Though I suppose you’re the best of a bad lot.”

“Look, you’re not going to get a rise out of me.” Remus said, through gritted teeth. He would walk faster if he could, but his gammy hip was playing up again. “I’d tell you to bugger off back to your mates, but I know you haven’t got any.”

“I know about you,” Snape hissed, “Care home brat.”

“This care home brat beat you at Arithmancy last year. And History.”

“I’ll find out what you’re up to.”

“Well, good luck.” Remus knew he had done a good job of covering his tracks – even if Severus found out he had made a phone call, what did that matter? “I really don’t know what’s got you so wound up, Snivellus. Not enough first years to curse or something?”

“There’s something not right about you.” Snape said, falling back now as a gang of sixth years approached, “Lily doesn’t believe me, but I’ll work it out. So watch your back, *Loony Lupin*.”

Remus swore at him, and marched off towards Honeyduke’s, hoping that he looked more careless

than he felt.

Chapter End Notes

It's my birthday :)

Fifth Year: Wishin' and Hopin'

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“He wants a party, obviously.” James said, walking between lessons one afternoon.

“In our dorm?” Remus asked, struggling with his ridiculously heavy book bag.

“Common room, I think. He wants everyone involved.”

“Of course,” Remus smiled fondly. He shifted his bag again.

“Want me to levitate that for you? I levitated Pete all the way up to divination, yesterday.”

“Is that how he got that bruise?” Remus raised an eyebrow.

“Not my fault Sirius shut the trap door too soon. Anyway, this birthday party - I think he wants it to be like yours last year.”

“Oh no,” Remus shook his head, “I’m not carrying him all the way back from Hogsmeade in that state again.”

“No, still in the common room. I just mean he wants alcohol. It *is* his sixteenth...”

“Well I’m not holding his hair back when he starts puking, either.” Remus said firmly.

James ruffled his hair as a group of girls walked past, all staring at him. Sometimes Remus was glad he had no interest in the opposite sex, because otherwise walking around with the quidditch captain might be unbearable. No wonder Peter liked to flaunt Desdemona so much.

The Sirius and Mary saga was currently at tolerable levels. Nothing had happened during the Hogsmeade visit, as far as Remus knew - and Mary would have almost certainly told him if it had. Apparently she wanted him to ‘prove’ that he could be a gentleman before she consented to be his girlfriend.

“A gentleman!” Sirius scoffed, when the marauders were alone, “I speak five languages! I have a family motto! I can ballroom-bloody-dance! I have *twelve* sets of dress robes! What more does she want??”

“Now you know my pain.” James sighed in response.

“She wants you to respect her,” Peter tried to explain.

“I do respect her!” Sirius said, piously, “She’s got the best tits in the year. That’s very respectable.”

Remus buried his head in his hands to hide the fact that he was smiling - because *surely* Sirius was never going to get a girlfriend with that attitude.

“So,” James said, now that the girls had passed and they were almost at the Great Hall, “Good idea? Big party, lots of noise, lots of booze, lots of girls?”

“Oh, yeah, sounds great!” Remus replied, half-heartedly.

“Aww, I know you’re shy, Moony, but I swear, loads of girls like you. You just need to know how to talk to them.”

Remus thought that was a bit rich, coming from James ‘oi, Evans!’ Potter, but he said nothing. “Anyway,” James went on, grinning as they entered the hall. “You can be the JD, you know all the music.”

“The *DJ*,” Remus corrected.

“Whatever. All right, Wormtail?” James elbowed Peter, who was sitting with his girlfriend at the Ravenclaw table. She frowned at James,

“Why have you started calling him that?? It’s a terrible nickname!”

“Nah,” Remus smirked, “Suits him down the the ground.”

Peter flicked two fingers at both of them and returned to his lunch. They’d all been playing about with nicknames, partly because they wanted to finish the map by Christmas and needed the aliases, partly because James and Sirius just liked the idea of having codenames. They’d made a game of never calling each other by the name name twice, but after ‘squeaker’, ‘whiskers’, ‘scabbers’ and ‘cheese-muncher’ had been tested, ‘Wormtail’ had ended up sticking for Peter.

Remus was loving every minute - now they knew how he felt. Though he had to admit, he had grown quite fond of ‘Moony’.

They sat at the Gryffindor table. Sirius and Mary were already there, chatting animatedly.

“Fido,” James nodded, as he sat.

“Rudolph.” Sirius replied, with an an identical nod.

“Where’ve you two been?” Mary asked, “Didn’t you have a free?”

“Library.” Remus said, reaching for the soup ladle, standing to lift the lid on the steaming tureen between them. Tomato - his favourite. “You two are acting like we don’t have OWLs coming up.”

“I’ll do my revision at Christmas,” Mary shrugged, “I’m not that fussed. I’m more nervous about the career interviews.”

“Career interviews?” Remus sat down, alarmed.

“Lily was telling me,” Mary explained, “After OWLs we have to go and have a meeting with McGonagall about what to do after school finishes. No idea what I’ll say - if this war carries on I won’t even be able to get a job as a muggleborn.”

“You will,” James said fiercely, “We’re going to win.”

“Well, even so,” Mary shrugged, “I dunno what I want to do when we leave. The only wizard job I know anything about is teaching, and I definitely don’t want to do that.”

An owl appeared from somewhere above them, landing beside Sirius’s plate. He rolled his eyes - it was a Black family owl.

“At least it’s not a howler.” James said, cheerfully, buttering his bread roll. Sirius ripped open the white envelope and Remus watched his blue eyes flicker across the text. He stood up, looking over at the Slytherin table. Mary, Remus and James all turned to look too. Regulus was watching his

brother. Sirius made eye contact with him, raised the letter and his wand, and said,

“Incendio.”

Mary yelped as the piece of parchment burst into flames between Sirius’s fingers. Sirius sat back down, satisfied.

“Bad news, then?” James asked, returning to his lunch.

“A summons to spend my birthday with my darling brother.”

“Well. Is that so bad?” James asked.

“Yes.” Remus said, sternly. He had not forgotten the vicious cuts on the backs of Sirius’s legs.

“Why did you do that?” A voice behind them spoke. Regulus had actually left the Slytherin table to confront his brother. Sirius ignored him, instead continuing to eat his food. “Sirius.” Regulus said, louder this time, “Why did you burn that letter?”

“C’mon, Mary,” Sirius said, standing up again, carefully avoiding eye contact, “Let’s go, we’ve got Charms next, haven’t we?”

“It wasn’t from mum,” Regulus said, his eyes overbright and his cheeks turning unnaturally pink, “I wrote it myself, I wanted to see you.”

But Sirius was having none of it, and had already swept away from the table, Mary on his arm.

“I can talk to him, if you want?” James turned to Regulus.

The younger Black brother blinked a few times, then glared at James. Remus could see his long eyelashes glittering with angry tears.

“Piss off, Potter, no one asked you. If he’s happy with his mudblood girlfriend then fine. I don’t care!” And with that, Regulus gave his own flounce, returning to his friends on the other side of the hall.

James sighed, heavily, playing with his soup.

“Real flair for the dramatic, those Blacks.”

* * *

Thursday 30th October 1975

Sirius’s birthday fell rather unfortunately on a Monday that year, so they decided to hold the party on the Saturday which preceded it. This was not long after the marauder’s second full moon spent together in the Shrieking Shack, which had been just as successful as the last, if not more so, because they were all much more prepared.

Remus had managed to get hold of two bottles of firewhisky from a seventh year who had once bought cigarettes from him - James paid, of course. The rest of the Gryffindors were quite used to marauder parties now, and those who weren’t interested were armed with silencing charms for their dorm rooms. Lily did not think this was reasonable.

“Really, Remus, we can’t disrupt the whole house just because it’s Sirius’s birthday!”

“Why not?” Remus yawned. It was late, and they were patrolling the fourth floor again. “We did it last year. And the year before that.”

“Last year coincided with a quidditch victory.” Lily said, “That was a house celebration.”

“Well, so’s this.”

“No, this is a Sirius celebration.”

“Yeah. Everyone loves Sirius.”

“Hmph.”

It was true - Lily was potentially the only Gryffindor who didn’t at least find James and Sirius funny. Everyone else loved the idea of a party. “You ought to put a stop to it.” she said.

“Why me?!”

“Because you’re a *prefect*, Remus. Why d’you think they gave you that badge?”

“Believe me, I have no idea.” He yawned again. His eyes itched with tiredness, “Have we done enough, yet?” He whinged, “Haven’t seen any students for ages.”

“Oh, I suppose you’re right,” Lily said, catching his yawn. “I’ll just check the girl’s loo’s here, then let’s head back.”

“Mm.” Remus leaned against the wall and waited while Lily went in to investigate. She was nothing if not thorough. She clearly loved being a prefect as much as James loved being quidditch captain.

Remus was definitely *not* enjoying the responsibility. As if he didn’t have enough to do, with OWLs on the horizon, not to mention full moons, a war and keeping on guard for various Slytherin attacks. Speaking of which.

“Loitering outside the girls loos?” A voice slithered up from behind him. Remus turned to see Snape coming around the corner. “Hoping Moaning Myrtle will go out with you if you ask nicely?”

Remus groaned and rolled his eyes,

“Oh piss off, will you. I really will give you detention this time; you’re out of bounds.”

“Just try it.” Severus narrowed his eyes.

“Go back to your dorm.”

“Make me.”

Remus had been doing his utmost to keep his temper under control this year - and he’d been doing fairly well, other than that small altercation with Regulus. But Snape seemed very keen to make himself an exception. Ever since their encounter in Hogsmeade, Remus had noticed the Slytherin student watching him; appearing from behind corners or following him into classrooms. This was the latest in a string of recent ambushes, and Remus’s nerves were wearing thin.

Fortunately for Severus, at that very moment Lily completed her inspection and walked out of the toilets.

“Sev!” She said, sounding half surprised, half concerned. Her eyes flashed between Snape and Remus, “What’s going on?”

“I was just telling Snivellus that he’s about to get a detention for being out of bounds...” Remus said, smugly. He knew that Lily was one of the only people Snape cared about, and that the last thing he wanted was to lose face in front of her.

“Don’t call him that!” She frowned. “You really ought to be in your own common room at this time of night,” Lily said to Severus, reproachfully.

“I wanted to make sure you were ok,” Severus said, smoothly, “It isn’t safe wandering around the castle with delinquents.”

“Watch it, Snape,” Remus withdrew his wand.

“Watch what, muggle-lover?”

“You slimy, filthy...”

“Stop it, both you you!” Lily shouted, pulling out her own wand, “Or I’ll turn you both into mice and you can take your chances with Mrs Norris!”

They both stared at her, dumbstruck. “Quite right,” she said, drawing herself up to full height. “Now, Severus, go back to the dungeons. Remus, shut up and come with me.”

With that, she stormed off, plaits bouncing behind her like two copper whips.

Remus had to walk very fast to catch her up, and was panting by the time they reached the top of the second staircase.

“I didn’t start it, you know,” he told her, “Ol’ Snivellus has been following me around all year, the slimeball.”

“I don’t want to hear it!” She snapped, “I don’t even care who started it anymore, you lot or him, I think you’re all horrible bullies.”

“Lily!”

“I mean it, Remus, I’ll curse you!”

Girls . Remus thought, grumpily, as he let her go on ahead, rubbing his poor hip. *Mental. Every last one.*

* * *

Saturday 1st November 1975

Well you can bump and grind

If it’s good for your mind

You can twist and shout

Let it all hang out

But you won’t fool the children of the revolution...

The Slytherins might all have high profile careers ahead of them. The Ravenclaws probably kept the coolest heads in an emergency. And if you wanted anything done well then you could count on a Hufflepuff. But Gryffindor Tower threw a bloody good party.

Word had got out, and a steady stream of Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw students were sneaking in through the portrait hole - which was supposed to be manned by Peter, who had got drunk very quickly and was apparently extremely hospitable after a few firewhiskies. By ten o'clock the common room was heaving, awash in dazzling red and gold, full of chatter, laughter and music.

Remus had started off in charge of the record player, and had implemented a system, based on the way a muggle jukebox worked using a simple levitation/locomotor spell combination. However, things had quickly got out of hand, and in the end he'd abandoned his post in favour of having a good time. Sirius, who was on his third or fourth whisky by now, was having the time of his life; centre of attention and surrounded by girls.

The Gryffindor girls had been pouring over a copy of *Marie Claire* all afternoon, and Remus noticed that they were all dressed very differently for this year's party - their skirts had got shorter, the colours less conservative and the makeup was something else.

Mary had performed a spell on her eyelashes that made them long and thick, like bat's wings. She looked utterly stunning in a royal blue mini skirt and white blouse with long bell sleeves, cut low to accentuate what Sirius called 'the best tits in the year'. Marlene was very striking too, her fair hair combed out for once, rather than in its usual practical ponytail, in white flares and a floaty paisley print top. And even after Lily's outburst the other night, she was smiling and chatting away with everyone else, wearing an emerald green crocheted dress.

"I think tonight might be the night, y'know," James slurred, collapsing into the seat next to Remus like a sack of potatoes.

"Oh yeah?" Remus mused conversationally, "And what makes you think that, Prancer?" (He was running out of Father Christmas's reindeer; they were going to have to settle on one eventually).

"Look at her!" James gushed, "She's obviously trying to get my attention."

"How?"

"*Look* at her!"

"Oh yeah," Remus patted his friend's knee indulgently, "Yeah, I definitely see it. She's mad for you, mate."

"I just need to work out how to impress her..." James downed the remains of his whisky. Remus didn't know how many that made - but it wasn't his job to babysit anyone.

"You could try talking to her about Charms," Remus suggested, "You were struggling with that banishing incantation last week, and she nailed it on the first go."

James looked at him as if he was insane.

"No, I'll come up with something. Something to really wow her."

He got up and wandered away before Remus could try to tell him that Lily Evans probably did not want to be 'wowed'. And anyway, he was distracted at that moment by Sirius, who had begun dancing with Mary to the final bars of the T.Rex song blaring out. Sirius often joked that the only kind of dancing he knew was ballroom - but here was evidence that that had been a lie. Remus

looked away quickly, blushing.

“Drink, Remus?” Marlene now landed beside him, taking James’s place. She clutched a bottle of something greenish.

“What the hell is that?”

“Witches Brew,” she smiled, pouring it into his cup. He sipped the fluorescent green liquid - it was very sweet, with a slight apple taste. Definitely alcoholic.

“That’s going to make me so sick,” he grinned.

“Ugh, look at him,” Marlene sighed, watching Sirius dancing, “Could those jeans be any tighter?!”

Remus mumbled something into his cup, taking another gulp. “She’s definitely going to go out with him again,” Marlene said, “Mary always gets what Mary wants.”

“I thought you fancied James?”

“Mm, well they’re both pretty gorgeous, to be honest. I swing back and forth. But Potter’s so ga-ga for Lily it hardly seems worth it. Plus, I’m on the quidditch team, aren’t I? I’d never hear the end of it if I went after the captain.”

“There are other boys,” Remus said.

“Not like Sirius.” She lay her head on his shoulder, drowsily.

He finished his drink in one go and allowed her to pour him some more. He was getting a taste for it, whatever it was - Remus had always liked sweet things. The T.Rex song finally ended, and the next album spun itself out of its sleeve and fluttered onto the turntable.

Wishin' and hopin' and thinkin' and prayin'

Plannin' and dreamin' each night of his charms...

That won't get you into his arms...

“Oh god,” Remus moaned, “Who put Dusty Springfield in the pile?!”

“I love this one!” Marlene sat up, smiling.

Sure enough, the bouncy pop record had an amazing effect on every other girl at the party, as they all began to bop along to the tune, singing along loudly. Remus considered taking that moment to nip upstairs for a cheeky fag, but Marlene hoisted him to his feet,

“C’mon, darling, let’s have a dance,” She flung her arms around his neck, “I’ll pretend you’re a tall handsome stranger, and you can pretend I’m Raquel Welch or something.”

Show him that you care just for him

Do the things he likes to do

Wear your hair just for him, 'cause

You won't get him

Thinkin' and a-prayin', wishin' and a-hopin'...

Remus was unsteady on his feet at the best of times, but after mixing drinks all evening, and with Marlene hanging off him, giggling and swinging him about, it was all he could do to cling on for dear life.

“Yes, Moony!” Sirius crowded, as he and Mary moved closer to them, “I never knew you could dance!”

“Oh yeah, I’m the next Fred Astaire,” Remus raised an ironic eyebrow, holding Marlene’s hand over her head as she twirled around, then struggled to regain her balance.

“You’re such a sweet couple,” Mary said, leaning into Sirius. Remus shook his head, snorting with laughter.

So if you're thinkin' of how great true love is

All you gotta do is hold him and kiss him and squeeze him and love him...

“Oi, Evans!” James had remerged, apparently ready to enact his plan. The whole room turned to look at him, standing on top of one of the study tables with his broom held aloft.

“Oh no...” Remus breathed.

“Oh yes!” Sirius cheered.

“POTTER!” Lily Evans shouted, “Get DOWN from there, you’ll hurt yourself!”

“Watch this!” James cried, gleefully, thrilled by the attention. He leapt onto his broom and soared upwards at an astonishing rate.

“He’s never fallen off before,” Marlene said, uncertainly, as James began the first of a series of loops and dives, each shakier than the last.

“Has he ever been drunk before, though?” Mary countered.

“He’s fine!” Sirius laughed. They all watched as James flew around and around the rafters, faster and faster, until Remus’s neck hurt and he was in danger of whiplash.

Evidently, Lily had had enough too.

“*Petrificus Totalus !*” She commanded, pointing her wand at James. He stopped at once, freezing in mid-air, but Lily was incredibly deft and switched seamlessly to a levitation charm, lowering him slowly to the ground. She set him down on the carpet, and stood over him, hands on her hips.

He blinked up at her, unable to speak, but full of plain adoration.

“You idiot.” She said. “Ten points from Gryffindor, and a weeks detention!” And with that, she left him on the carpet and returned to her friends.

Remus un-petrified James and helped him to his feet, handing him another whisky. The music had slowed down now, it sounded like Fairport Convention.

“Tough luck, mate,” he said, trying to sound sympathetic.

“What do you mean?” James grinned back, slightly dazed but no worse for wear, “Didn’t you see

how she looked at me?”

“Er... yeah...”

“Smitten.” He murmured, staggering backwards slightly, until Remus guided him into an armchair.

“Totally smitten.”

“Drink your drink, James.”

“Cheers Moony, you’re the best.”

“Mmm,” Remus replied, watching Mary wrap her arms around Sirius’s neck and lay her head against his chest as they danced slowly. “I’m the best.”

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics used in this chapter:

Children of the Revolution - T-Rex

Wishin' and Hopin' - I believe this was first performed by Dionne Warwick, but the version I'm thinking of here is by Dusty Springfield.

Fifth Year: Jealous Moon

Thursday 18th December 1975

"I'd like that essay back in January... yes, Mr Pettigrew, that is in addition to the one on the pitfalls of the *Gemino* curse." McGonagall gave a thin smile that was anything but sympathetic.

Peter looked pretty dreadful, but the whole class felt it. Their workload had grown so enormous in the run up to Christmas that Sirius had had to perform a shrinking charm on his books, notes and papers just to fit them all under his bed. Remus felt that this was only a short-term solution - if Sirius actually took everything out and organised it for once, he'd have no problem fitting it all neatly on his assigned shelves. Remus, who had never really owned enough things to make a mess with them, hated untidiness. Some nights he thought that the state of Sirius's bed was even more distracting than the boy sleeping in it.

Marlene was particularly distressed as they left the classroom for Potions.

"I just can't work out the duplication part, it's so confusing!"

"There's an easy way to get the pronunciation right," Remus said, struggling with his heavy bag again. His shoulders were very sore this week in the run up to the moon. "I can show you before we leave for Christmas if you want."

"Oh, yes please!" Marlene nodded gratefully, "You make everything easy to understand. Tonight?"

"No, I can't tonight," he said, smoothly, "Friday?"

"Oh, ok... I'll have to get all my packing done tonight though. Still got presents to wrap for mum and Danny."

This year, Remus had neatly wrapped every one of his Christmas gifts the moment he'd bought them, too excited to wait. Now he was looking forward to two uninterrupted weeks at the Potter's with Peter and James.

Sirius had been summoned home in a howler earlier in the term. Remus was conflicted about this; of course he was deeply concerned for his friend, who was sure to have a terrible time. But on the other hand, two weeks without Sirius taking up all the air in the room would be a welcome relief for Remus, whose willpower was starting to fail.

For example, just now, as he stood outside the dungeon entrance chatting to Marlene, it was taking every ounce of his energy not to stare directly over her shoulder, to where Mary and Sirius were locked in a very passionate embrace, which was bordering on obscene.

They had been like that since Sirius's birthday; every moment in each other's company seemed to be spent tongue wrestling - much to James's disgust.

"Evans, can't you stop them?" He asked, leaning against the wall, put out. "I want my friend back."

"There's nothing in the rules about displays of affection, Potter," Lily said, grimacing, "Don't you think I've checked?"

Fortunately, at that moment, Slughorn opened the door to his classroom and Remus hurried inside. He and Lily shared a desk at the front of the room, so at least he didn't have to see Sirius and Mary

making eyes at each other all lesson. The only saving grace was that at least Sirius didn't talk about her when she wasn't there - like Peter did with Desdemona, or James with Lily. Remus had begun looking forward to late nights in their dorm room, when he could pretend nothing at all had changed.

Potions was dull, as usual. Remus had plans to drop the subject as soon as he could after OWLs were finished with - he would pass by the skin of his teeth, if at all, and only thanks to Lily.

Slughorn gave them yet another assignment due in January.

"At this rate I'll be writing essays during Christmas dinner," Lily sighed as they packed away their things. "I can't wait for OWLs to be over, can you?"

"I s'pose we'll just have to start work on NEWTs once these are finished," Remus replied pessimistically. "And Dirk Cresswell told me we won't get our OWL results until the end of the summer."

"What?! Oh no, that's going to ruin my holiday. Dad wants to take us all down to Cornwall in the caravan and I was really looking forward to it."

Remus nodded, gravely. Even though it was not yet Christmas, he had been looking forward to the summer holidays too. Two long, warm, simple months with Grant sounded like utter bliss. He'd written Grant a Christmas card, but hadn't made his mind up whether or not to send it. There was nothing interesting inside - just a standard festive greeting - but he was shy about it. Grant might think it was silly. Remus had been carrying it around in his book bag for a week.

"So, what are you up to tonight?" Lily asked, as they left the classroom on their way to lunch.

"Hmm? Nothing."

"I heard you tell Marlene you were busy, and we're not on the rota for patrol tonight..."

"Oh, er... it's something else. Detention."

"Remus, you never get detention," Lily laughed, "Come on, what is it? A prank? A secret affair?"

Remus gave a mysterious smile, which he hoped was something like Sirius and James's -

"Ask me no questions and I shall tell you no lies."

"Just try not to break any laws," she grinned back, elbowing him gently.

Remus tutted, as if he would never consider such a thing. Really, it was James, Sirius and Peter who were breaking the law. He was just an innocent werewolf bystander.

"Evans, Moony." James joined them as they reached the Great Hall. "May I join you for lunch, as you are the only two people in my life not currently snogging?"

"Oi, what am I, scotch mist?" Marlene nudged him as they sat down.

"My apologies, McKinnon," James bowed graciously, "I thank you for maintaining your decorum. Unlike some I could mention." He balled up serviette and threw it at Sirius's head. "Lovebirds! Get a bloody room, we're trying to eat!"

It had no effect.

“It’s pretty brave of her, snogging him all over the castle like that.” Marlene mused, “Or brave of him, I’m not sure. Either way, a pureblood and a muggleborn, flaunting their relationship--”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Lily said, bristling like an angry cat, “Mary is every bit as good as Sirius Black. Blood status has nothing to do with it.”

“Well obviously *I* know that.” Marlene said, defensively, “But... well, see for yourself.” She glanced over at the Slytherin table.

A number of Slytherins, Regulus among them, was watching the excessive display of affection taking place on the Gryffindor table. As a muggleborn, Mary had been a target for most of her school career, but it was clear that the disapproval had amped up since she had started going out with the heir to one of the oldest pureblood families in Britain.

It was deeply unnerving, the way they were all staring like that; narrow eyes and clenched fists. All of them except Snape - who was watching Remus.

“Bloody hell.” James muttered. “Bunch of weirdos.”

“I’m worried about her.” Marlene bit her lip. “If she gets cornered in the halls and Sirius isn’t there...”

“We’ll look out for her.” James said, gallantly. He looked at Remus and Lily, “Right?”

“Of course,” Remus nodded at once.

“Er... yeah,” Lily said, more slowly. She had a funny look on her face, as James caught her eye. As if she had seen something which surprised her. “Obviously. We all care about Mary, we won’t let anything happen.”

* * *

“He’s late.” Remus grumbled, wrapping his arms around himself and pacing. “He’s off snogging MacDonald, he’s not coming.”

“He’ll be here, Moony, give him a minute.”

“I don’t *have* a minute!” Remus snapped. His nerves were raw, he didn’t have the patience to be polite. “I need to go and see Madam Pomfrey *now*.”

“Ok, well you go, we’ll follow,” James said, “If Black doesn’t show up then me and Pete’ll come by ourselves. It’ll still work, I’m big enough to control you.”

Remus didn’t like the idea of that, but he was in too bad of a mood. He was just about to storm out of the room when the door swung open, almost hitting him in the face,

“Oops, sorry I’m late!” Sirius said. His hair was out of place and his cheeks were pinkish. Remus regarded him with disgust,

“I have to go.” He said, through gritted teeth.

“Yeah, I know, I’m really sorry, Moony.” Sirius tried a charming smile. “I was just with Mary, and--”

“I haven’t got time for this!” Remus left at once, marching purposefully down the stairs. Any time of the month - any time at all, other than the full moon - and Remus could keep all the plates

spinning; his desire for Sirius, his jealousy of Mary, his loneliness for someone to talk to. Just now it was all a bit too much.

He barely spoke to Madam Pomfrey all the way to the shack, and once they were halfway there he realised he could smell his friends - all three - following them under the invisibility cloak. Trying hard to shake off his temper and appear calm, he re-focussed his thoughts on Christmas with the Potters; the scent of clove and orange, the thick juicy currants in Mrs Potter's fruit cake, velvety white royal icing, the warmth of the fireplace. He felt a lot better, by the time Madam Pomfrey was locking him in.

"I'm really sorry, Moony," a voice said, moments before Sirius, James and Peter appeared as if out of nowhere. Sirius stepped forward guiltily, "I won't do it again."

"It's fine," Remus shrugged, hearing the click in his joints as he did so. "You made it in time. Everything's fine."

"Tell you what," Sirius grinned at them all, "Snogging's really moreish, once you get the hang of it."

James and Peter laughed. Remus smiled as politely as he could. He desperately wished he could tell them all the truth - that he wasn't the priggish, inexperienced boy they thought he was; that actually he knew *exactly* how much fun it was to be kissed for hours - the impossible intimacy of having someone to cling to. More than that, he knew how it felt when it was gone.

"Where does she think you are now?" James asked Sirius,

"Detention, obviously. Got to maintain my bad boy persona."

"Of course you do, Snuffles."

"Oh piss off, Buckeroo."

Remus closed his eyes as pain shot through his body. He bit his lip and rolled back on the bed,

"Better change," he said to his friends, "See you in a bit."

* * *

Friday 19th December 1975

"Bloody hell, Moony, I'm really not a fan of that bit." Sirius was saying softly, guiding Remus back into his bed.

"Mm, not my favourite part either." Remus responded, wincing against the morning light. "Sorry, it must be crap to watch."

He'd dislocated a shoulder again. What would happen when he finished school and Madam Pomfrey couldn't fix him anymore? Would he have to go to a hospital? Were there wizard hospitals?

"It was good though," James was saying, somewhere else in the room, "You're trusting us more and more."

"Yeah," Sirius agreed, "I reckon in the new year we can try leaving this place..."

"What?"

“Start exploring - there’s acres and acres of forest out there to explore, Moony. You deserve it.”

“Hmm.” Remus couldn’t think straight, he was too tired, too sore.

“See you later,” James whispered, just as Remus fell asleep.

When he woke up, he was already in a hospital bed, his arm was mended, and he felt as fit as a fiddle. What was more - it was the very last day of term, and tomorrow he would be boarding the Hogwarts Express back to London, then off to the Potters. He smiled to himself. He could not remember having been so happy in a very long time. When had he ever woken up from a full moon without a new scar? When had he ever had a Christmas to look forward to with a loving family? He might even have a go on James’s old broom, if someone bribed him with a bit of chocolate.

“Good afternoon, Mr Lupin,” Madam Pomfrey called out. She must have some kind of sixth sense; she always knew when he was awake.

“Good afternoon,” he called back, with a mild croak. He and Sirius had been howling together, he remembered. It had been a lovely thing - like singing.

“Another very good night!” The medi-witch approached his bed, “I’ll fetch you some lunch, but then you’re free to go. Merry Christmas, my dear.”

“Merry Christmas,” he smiled up at her. He would leave her gift behind on the bed - he was too shy to hand it over in person.

Fifth Year: 'Twas the night before Christmas

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Saturday 20th December 1975

“I will literally curse you both with a lip locking charm if you plan to do that all the way to London.” Lily said, raising her wand to Sirius and Mary. Her deadpan expression was very hard to read, and the couple quickly disentangled. Mary stuck out her tongue, cheekily.

“You too, Wormy!” James held up his own wand, grinning at Lily like a lunatic.

Peter and Desdemona moved apart too, smiling sheepishly.

The carriage was extremely cramped. Remus was squashed up against the window next to James, with Sirius and Mary by the door. On the opposite row of seats, Lily and Marlene were squeezed in beside Peter and Desdemona.

“We’re just saying goodbye,” Mary smirked, laying her head on Sirius’s shoulder.

“It’s only two weeks, and you can write to each other.” Lily replied, smartly.

“Er... actually, better if none of you write to me.” Sirius said. “I’m not likely to get the letters anyway, and unless you want my dear mother reading them...”

“You’ve got the mirror, though?” James said, seriously, “You can still get in touch with us if you need to?”

“Yeah, ‘course.” Sirius smiled at him, reassuringly, patting his breast jacket pocket.

Remus stared out of the window, pressing his forehead on the cold glass. The train moved sluggishly down to London. They passed the phone box he had used to call Grant and he felt a pang of guilt for not phoning again since then. He had been so busy with everything else in the end that he hadn’t even sent the Christmas card. Grant was supposed to be studying at the local secondary modern, but at sixteen he could leave whenever he wanted. Remus tried to convince him over the summer to finish his CSE’s, even maybe take a GCE if he could, but Grant had just laughed at him, as if education was one of Remus’s peculiar eccentricities.

Matron usually got the St Edmund’s boys apprenticeships where they showed aptitude for handiwork, but Remus couldn’t remember Grant ever mentioning the things he was good at - only the things he struggled with like Maths and English. And Remus couldn’t very well tell Grant any of his best subjects, could he? The boys who didn’t get apprenticeships had to find their own way, once they turned eighteen. Remus wasn’t sure--

“Oi, Moony, wakey wakey!” Sirius barked, wrenching Remus out of his daydream, “Trolley’s here, don’t want to miss your lunch, do you?”

“Oh, cheers,” Remus turned back into the noisy, over warm carriage, where James was buying at least twelve pasties on top of all the sweets they could manage.

“We’ll never get through all of this!” Lily scolded, smiling slightly.

“You’ve clearly never seen Moony eat,” James winked.

“Oooh, I wish I had your metabolism, Remus!” Desdemona said. “My mother’s always telling me I ought to start dieting.”

“Nothing wrong with having curves,” Mary said, taking a huge bite out of her own pasty. “Gives ‘em something to hold on to!”

The girls all giggled, even Lily, who was blushing hard. Remus wished the journey would be over soon.

Of course, as the train pulled into King’s Cross, he felt a horrible twist to his insides as Sirius fell quiet, his face pinched and pale. The girls and Peter all hurried to gather their things, eager to meet their families on the platform. Remus and James were deliberately slow, waiting until Mary had finally left the car, then helping Sirius with his own bags.

“Check in every evening, right?” James gripped his best friend’s shoulder, “If I don’t hear from you I’m sending help.”

Sirius grinned gratefully.

“I’ll be fine. Nothing I haven’t done before.”

“Please be careful!” Remus burst out, “Keep your head down, don’t be so... so... *you!*”

Sirius laughed.

“Sound advice, Moony.”

Remus lowered his gaze, smiling bashfully. He wanted to hug him, but it was too late. Regulus was standing in the open doorway, arms folded.

“Ready?”

Sirius nodded, and did not turn back. James and Remus watched the brothers leave. They were almost the same height now. Regulus had a slimmer build, perhaps, but from behind they could be twins.

“He’ll be ok.” James said, and Remus instinctively knew that he was reassuring himself, more than anything else. After a moment, James was back to normal. He grabbed his suitcase handle (and Remus’s too, without a word) and exhaled, “C’mon then, Moony - let’s do Christmas!”

* * *

Wednesday 24th December 1975

It did not snow over Christmas of 1975 either - fortunately, nor did it rain, which meant (to James, anyway) that conditions were perfect for lots and lots of quidditch practice. Remus gave in and did as he was instructed. It took both their minds off Sirius. Remus was never going to be any great shakes at flying, but after the first three days in the air he at least wasn’t terrified of falling any more. He even managed to get a quaffle past Peter once.

Between drills, the boys enjoyed all of the festive trimmings Remus had come to expect from a typical Potter Christmas; tinsel, lights, wrapping paper, late nights eating buttered teacakes, hearty dinners and bright mornings. Mr and Mrs Potter were as delightful as ever - though it was evident

that their ongoing involvement in Dumbledore's resistance movement was taking its toll.

Mr Potter didn't join them outside as much, but locked himself in his study. When he emerged he moved stiffly, his back bent; no longer the sprightly mischief maker he had been only three short years ago. Mrs Potter, who was still everything a mother ought to be, had more silver hair than Remus remembered, and dark rings under her eyes. She still always had a smile for her boys, when they came in from the cold.

"James, go and get your father, it's time for supper - have you spoken to Sirius today? Send him our love, will you dear? Remus! You look frozen through, go and stand by the fire for a bit and warm up... I've put out an extra chop for you so make sure you eat it. I don't know how you boys keep growing the way you do... Hello, Peter love, staying for tea? Make sure your mother knows..."

They were speaking to Sirius as much as possible. Every night Remus and James would kneel on James's bed with the mirror lying open between them and wait for their friend to appear. It was always an immense relief when he did - those wicked blue eyes and cheeky grin, promising them he was ok.

"Reg's being a complete prat, as usual, and mother is an eternal delight, but nothing out of the ordinary."

The trouble was, Remus thought, pursing his lips, neither he nor James really understood what 'ordinary' meant in the Black household. So, there was no way of knowing how much danger Sirius was in.

"Can't say much," Sirius would whisper, after his brief updates, "Anyone could be listening. Bloody portraits are spies here." He looked tired.

"Wish we could just go and get him." James would say, hopelessly.

"Me too." Remus nodded along. Every night the same.

The final night they heard from Sirius was the night before Christmas Eve (*was that the eve of Christmas Eve?*, Remus found himself thinking childishly. Something Grant might say, to make Remus laugh.) The irony of it all, was that on that night, the 23rd of December 1975, Sirius was in high spirits. In fact, Remus might go so far as to say he sounded *positive*. Optimistic.

"They're being ok today, actually," he smiled up through the compact mirror, "Actually sort of... nice. Friendly. Dad smiled at me. I dunno if dad has ever smiled at me. They keep talking about moving past our problems as a family..."

"That's good," James smiled back, encouraging, "Maybe the war has knocked some sense into them."

"Traditional Christmas Eve dinner tomorrow night," Sirius said, "All the Blacks in one place - joy. I should be able to get away for our usual time, just don't laugh at my stupid dress robes, ok?"

James and Remus smiled, and promised not to laugh. They went to bed that night feeling reassured; looking forward to their own Christmas Eve plans.

These plans of course involved more quidditch practice - but thankfully only an hour of it. Afterwards Mrs Potter called them in and requested that they fetch the nice china down from the attic, along with the big Christmas tablecloth,

“With everything going on I’m so behind this year...” she murmured, stirring a bowl of mincemeat ready for pies. Remus noticed that her fingernails were bitten down to the quick.

“Have we got many people coming this year, mum?” James asked, as he carefully unloaded the box of china plates and bowls, handing them to Remus for a quick rinse under the tap.

“Mm... well, Darius, of course, he’ll always show up for a hot dinner if one’s on offer.”

Remus scowled, but said nothing. Mrs Potter continued, “I invited the Bones’s and the Tonks’s... but everyone seems to want to keep to themselves this year. The Pettigrews will be over, I imagine. Perhaps some people from the ministry, your father’s friends...”

“Dumbledore?”

“No, dear, he’ll be busy.”

Remus was glad of this. Dumbledore was so serious these days, and his name always seemed to be spoken with a sense of dread. He brought bad news. The Potters were such nice people, why couldn’t they invite nice teachers, like Professor Flitwick, or even Professor Ferox? Though, Remus mused, as he wiped down a large serving dish, he was probably just plain old *Mr* Ferox now. Or Leo - that was his given name, according to Mary. Leo Ferox. Sirius Black. Maybe Remus just had a thing for cool names.

After dinner, James and Remus convened on James’s bed once again at their usual time for their appointment with Sirius. But when James opened the mirror, nothing appeared - only their own reflections.

“He had that dinner,” Remus said, though it didn’t feel right. “He might be late.”

So they waited. After half an hour, most of which they spent in anxious silence, James tried speaking softly into the mirror.

“Sirius?” He called, “Are you there?”

Nothing.

“I don’t like it.” James said. Remus didn’t know what to say. “C’mon,” James got up, “I’m telling dad.”

Mr Potter frowned when he heard, but wasn’t much help.

“We can’t jump to any conclusions, James. You said all was well, yesterday.”

“Yeah, but...”

“I’ve been to Black family banquets before,” Mr Potter said, thoughtfully, “They run on late - especially if Orion is presiding. Man likes to hear himself speak. Not unlike Sirius.”

“We’ll wait up a bit longer,” Mrs Potter said, smoothing down her son’s hair lovingly, “Let’s have some tea, eh? Come and sit by the fire.”

They did. Gully the house elf came in with the tea tray, laden with the steaming pot and a plate of biscuits too, but neither James nor Remus was in the mood to eat. The hour grew later and later - the Potters had a grandfather clock in the hall, and Remus could hear it ticking away mercilessly. The compact mirror lay open in James’s lap, reflecting only the flickering orange of the fireplace.

Even James's parents looked nervous now. Mr Potter got up a few times and paced. Mrs Potter kept bustling about the room; straightening the ornaments on the mantelpiece or rearranging the brightly packaged presents under the tree.

At eleven o'clock, an owl came screeching out of the black night, towards the living room window, and it was only Mrs Potter's quick thinking and speedy wand work that stopped it from shattering the glass. It was a huge, stately eagle owl - the same kind the Blacks used. It wailed, agitated and clearly exhausted from its journey. James wrested the note from its leg and tore it open. His eyes widened and he let out a strange, strangled noise. Remus jumped up to read over his shoulder.

He's in trouble. Please help. R.A.B.

"Effie, send for Dumbledore at once." Mr Potter said, joining Remus at James's side.

Remus began to tremble. He had never known terror like it. He wanted to scream, shout - hit something. James was the same, he could tell - he'd turned white as a sheet, reading the note over and over.

"We need to go," James said, his voice broken, "We need to go and get him now."

"We will," Mr Potter said, "Just stay calm."

Remus laughed. It was hugely inappropriate, but no one seemed to notice. *Stay calm.*

There was no time for anything else. The fireplace crackled loudly, then blazed bright emerald green. Mr Potter put his arms around both boys and pulled them back sharply. A chaos of noise and shouts echoed through the chimney flue from another fireplace, in another house. The body of Sirius Black tumbled out of the flames and onto the carpet at their feet.

Chapter End Notes

'Secondary Modern' - the UK school system used to be even more classist than it is now. At aged 11, students were split into two groups, supposedly based on ability, and the secondary school they went to would either be a 'Grammar School' (for the academically inclined kids), or a 'Secondary Modern', which was supposed to teach more 'practical' skills. Kids who went to a Secondary Modern were more likely to go into factory or menial jobs, and took less academic exams.

CSE - Certificate of Secondary Education. The final exams taken at secondary school aged 16.

GCE - General Certificate of Education, also known as 'O-Levels', or 'ordinary levels' were more academic exams taken at 16. If you got enough you could move on to 'A-Levels' (advanced).

The school leaving age was raised to 16 in the UK in 1971.

Once again, thanks for reading, and for your lovely comments! I promise to update ASAP!

Fifth Year: Unforgivable

Chapter Summary

CW for themes of domestic abuse.

Remus, James and Mr Potter ran forward at once. Remus collapsed to his knees, reaching Sirius first. He was lying face down, black hair pouring like blood on the red carpet. Remus didn't even think, just rolled him over. His face was pale, his eyes were closed, but he was alive. Yes, Remus could hear Sirius's heart, pounding hard behind his ribs. He could smell the stink of fear, mixed with adrenaline.

"Sirius?!" James was there too, pressing his head to Sirius's chest to listen,

"He's alive." Remus said, his voicing sounding strange. He was clutching Sirius's shoulders still, where he had turned him, he couldn't let go, his hands fisting the fine velvet dress robes.

"Effie!" Mr Potter was shouting, "Quickly!" He bent over Sirius, "Stand back, boys, give him some air..."

"Mmm." Sirius stirred, slightly, his eyelashes fluttered, but nothing more.

"What's wrong with him?" Remus asked the room, desperately. Mr Potter was guiding him away, he had to let go. He crawled backwards, crab-like as Mrs Potter rushed in. He knew his legs wouldn't stand, just yet.

Euphemia Potter was on the carpet in seconds, pulling Sirius's head into her lap. He must have made another noise, because she started whispering to him, sweet, small things;

"Shhh now, love, I'm here, you're safe, shhh..."

Remus felt his eyes well up, drew his legs up under his chin and wrapped his arms around them. What was happening? He looked over at James, sitting opposite him on the living room floor, just as shocked, just as frightened. There was a distant *CRACK* outside, and Mr Potter left the room, returning moments later with Dumbledore. He seemed to bring the cold in with him; Remus felt the chill settle into his bones despite the fire which continued to blaze.

"Moody's outside," the old man said to James's father, "Protective charms, everything in his arsenal. No one else will be coming here tonight."

Good. Remus thought. *Good. Lock us all up in here, never let anyone near him again.*

"How is he, Effie?" Dumbledore stood over Mrs Potter, who was still cradling Sirius. She was performing some kind of magic, her eyes closed, wand running over the unconscious boy's body, her lips were moving fast without making a sound. She eventually looked up, more shaken than Remus had ever seen her, fiery rage in her eyes.

"He'll live." She said. "He needs rest."

"Was it...?" Mr Potter looked nervous. Mrs Potter closed her eyes again, and nodded.

“Cruciatu.”

James’s covered his face with his hands. Remus just felt empty - as if everything that had ever made any kind of sense to him had been wrung out. The torture curse.

“Boys.” Mr Potter suddenly said, sharply, looking at James, then Remus, “I know you want to stay, but we need you to go to bed, just now. There’s nothing you can do for Sirius at the moment.”

“But dad!” James started, climbing shakily to his feet. There were tears in his eyes too.

“James!” Mrs Potter said, from the floor. “No. Bed.”

She didn’t shout, but every man in the room seemed to shrink, slightly. There was no question of disobeying her.

Remus wasn’t sure how he got up, whether Dumbledore helped him, or whether he did it himself. Nor was he sure how he left the room that Sirius was in. It seemed like hours later that he was standing on the first floor landing, with James. Gully was lighting candles throughout the house, moving silently. The portraits along the staircases were sleeping. James held open his bedroom door, and Remus went inside without a word.

They lay on the bed, side by side, over the covers still in their clothes. They had been sitting on the same bed only two or three hours before, waiting for Sirius to tell them he was ok. In the dark, James and Remus collected themselves, giving each other the time they needed.

James broke the quiet, of course.

“He’s here now.” He said, tonelessly. “He’s here now, and mum won’t ever let him go back, I know it.”

Remus nodded, because there weren’t any words. He didn’t know if James saw; they were both staring straight up. His mind was racing, and he said the first thing that felt like a coherent thought,

“Is that what happens? With that curse?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never seen it.”

“No, of course.”

“Mum used to be a healer. If anyone can help him...”

“And Dumbledore’s here.”

“Yeah, exactly.”

“If he’s...” Remus’s voice cracked, and he stopped talking.

“I know, mate.” James whispered.

They did not speak again until the morning.

* * *

Christmas Day 1975

Remus couldn’t believe he had fallen asleep. He cursed himself for being so thoughtless, so selfish.

You've no right to him he told himself angrily as he sat up, climbing off James's huge, comfortable four poster bed, *you've no right to call yourself his friend at all, if you can't even stay awake when he's...* he didn't know how Sirius was.

He left James still sleeping, and went to the bathroom. It was morning; the curtains has been drawn, presumably by Gully, and watery winter daylight filled the stairwell. The house was very quiet, no one else was awake yet. There was no usual smell of breakfast cooking or tea brewing on the hob. After he'd been to the loo and had a quick wash, Remus stood awkwardly in the hall.

He didn't want to go back into James's room; that seemed a bit weird, especially when he had his own things all laid out in one of the guest rooms. Sirius was in the room at the end of the hall, Remus could smell him. Mrs Potter was in there too. He didn't know where Mr Potter was.

"Master Lupin," a squeaky voice startled him from the stairs. It was Gully, his big brown eyes full of innocent concern, "Is you wanting breakfast, Master Lupin?"

Remus shook his head,

"No, thank you."

"Tis a terrible thing. Terrible bad thing." The wizened little creature shook its head sadly, ears wilting like a sorry puppy.

"Yes. Terrible." Remus sat on the stairs, glad for someone to talk to.

"I'm telling my mistress, and my master, we's got to be careful; we's got to protect our own. Gully is thinking we should go into hiding, Gully knows lots of families going into hiding now." Gully's brow creased, as if he was trying to remember something exactly right, "But my mistress is saying to me, 'Gully, we is responsible. We is a good, lucky family and we has many good things.' Mistress tells me we needs to be looking after everyone we can. She says if we don't, we is having nothing worth protecting at all."

"Didn't do a very good job of protecting Sirius." Remus scuffed the carpet angrily with his toe.

"No," Gully shook his big round head again, "Always, in war, there is people getting hurt."

Remus bit his lip. Behind them, a door opened,

"Gully?" The weak voice of Mrs Potter came, "Will you come and sit with Sirius while I -- oh, hello, Remus, dear."

She had been up all night, that was clear, but she still had a smile for him.

"Is he ok?" Remus stood up.

"No lasting damage," she croaked, her smile waning slightly, "Not on the outside, anyway. He's sleeping still, just a mild dose of potion. Would you like to sit with him? I need a little lie down before Monty gets home."

"Yeah, yeah of course," Remus started forward, eager to help in any way he could. He crossed the landing quickly, and slipped into the room.

"Send Gully to wake me as soon as he opens his eyes," Euphemia said, patting his shoulder gently, "Dumbledore will want to speak to him. He wanted to last night, but I wouldn't let him. Poor lamb."

“He was conscious, then? Last night?”

“Yes. For a little while,” Euphemia sighed, deeply, hollow with exhaustion, “But he was in no fit state for an interrogation.”

Remus nodded, dumbly.

She closed the door behind her. The room was dark, but that was ok. Remus could see in the dark; often he liked it.

The figure lying in the bed could not possibly be his friend, Sirius Black. Because Sirius Black never slept like that; facing up, hands by his side, covers neatly tucked over his chest. Sirius slept like a dog; all rumpled sheets and limbs akimbo, face down, arms thrown wide.

Remus approached with caution. Was this how it was, he wondered, the morning after a full moon? Was this how it felt to see your friend torn apart? It was unbearable. He sat in the seat by the bedside, a squashy purple armchair with a book splayed open on one arm. *Unforgivable: Caring for the Victims of Curses and Hexes*. Remus closed the book, wondering whether Mrs Potter had needed to consult it many times before. There was a handkerchief underneath it, damp with tears - Remus could smell the salt. It must have been difficult for her - as a healer and a mother. Had she looked at this black haired boy and seen James? Had she wondered what kind of parent would do such a thing?

He sat in the quiet, listening to Sirius breathing. Stupidly, he thought of Grant, who could be no help at all, except that he probably would have hugged Remus, and Remus felt that a hug was the only thing he wanted in the world, just now. The church bells echoed up the hill from the village. It was Christmas Day.

* * *

James came in and joined him, after an hour or so. He brought tea, and Remus accepted it gratefully. James raised his dark eyebrows at Remus, questioning, and Remus shook his head, *no*. James sat on the arm of the chair, and they did not speak.

It was another hour before Sirius so much as moved. A quiet stirring, then a flicker in his features, before his eyes eased open, heavy with sleep. It took him a moment to focus, and the room was still very gloomy. When he finally caught the shapes of James and Remus, his brow furrowed, then he cracked a smile,

“Bloody hell,” he said, hoarsely, “Who died?”

James laughed,

“Wanker.”

“Tosspot.” Sirius threw back.

“Arse.”

“Oi,” Sirius pushed himself up on his elbows, “Be nice, I’m an invalid you know.”

“Tell you what,” James grinned, “You really know how to make an entrance.”

“It’s in my noble blood.” Sirius smiled, then faltered, his eyes suddenly stricken. They all fell quiet again. “Sorry,” he muttered, looking down.

“Tea?”

“Please.”

“Gully!” James summoned the house elf, who was only too pleased to serve.

“So,” Sirius asked, the colour slowly returning to his cheeks, “You two been keeping a bedside vigil for me?”

“Actually, it’s mum who was up all night.”

“Oh yeah...” Sirius’s face grew distant, closed off. “I’ll thank her, obviously. Say sorry for showing up like that...”

“Don’t be stupid,” James shook his head, “She’d do anything for you. She loves you.”

Sirius’s eyes filled with tears and he looked away. Fortunately, Gully reappeared at that moment with a tea tray laden with cups, saucers, toast, muffins, sausages, eggs (scrambled, fried and boiled), smoked salmon, kippers, and even cereal.

None of them ate very much. Remus was hungry – starving, actually, but everything tasted like plastic so in the end he just downed cup after cup of scalding tea - no milk, no sugar. He wasn’t angry yet – anger was his usual response to feeling helpless, or sad, or in pain, but he felt like it might come later. Just now, he wanted to be whatever Sirius needed.

“Oh,” he said, suddenly, “I was supposed to get your mum, James - as soon as Sirius woke up.”

“Let her sleep,” Sirius said, resting back on his pillows.

“No, she wanted me to, so that she could get Dumbledore.”

“What for?” James asked, perplexed. “Everything’s fine, now.”

“He wanted to ask some questions-”

“No!” Sirius said.

James and Remus both turned to look at Sirius, who had paled again, his eyes big and frightened.

“Please,” he said, “Not yet, just... just let me have Christmas, ok? I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Ok mate, it’s ok...” James said, softly, leaning over to pat Sirius’s shoulder. “We won’t wake her up. You can pretend to be asleep, if you want. Anything you want.”

“Thanks.” Sirius relaxed back again. “Sorry.”

“Pfft.” James blew his hair up from his forehead. “It’s Christmas, isn’t it?”

Fifth Year: Aftermath

Chapter Summary

CW for description of nasty abuse stuff. Also a homophobic slur towards the end (might only be a slur in the UK, but still a slur.)

No one was angry that they'd tried to protect Sirius. Mrs Potter rose from her own bed when Mr Potter returned from wherever he'd been, and they both agreed that Dumbledore was sure to arrive of his own accord, eventually, and anything he wanted to ask Sirius could wait until then.

They salvaged the rest of the morning as best they could. Mr Potter cheerfully offered to apparate all of the presents up to Sirius's bedroom, but Sirius wouldn't have it.

"My legs work fine!" He insisted, "I want to come down and see the tree!"

So, they all gathered themselves up and got dressed or changed, then reconvened half an hour later in the living room. Remus couldn't help staring at the patch of carpet where he had seen Sirius's body fall less than twelve hours previous. The pain was sharp and startling. He had to look at the current, conscious Sirius; bundled up in blankets with yet another mug of tea on the couch opposite him, just to feel normal again.

The unwrapping of gifts still felt as joyful and natural as ever. A free for all, no order to it, they simply tore at wrapping paper until they were surrounded by it, strips of brightly coloured debris. It didn't matter what anyone got, only the memory of having received something nice on that awful morning. The Potters, of course, had plenty ready for both Sirius and Remus, and they promised Sirius even more yet to come -

"We'll get you some nice pictures, to brighten up your room," Mrs Potter said, "Which quidditch team do you support, sweetheart? Or perhaps one of those rock stars you kids like?"

Sirius looked at her as if he'd just received the most wonderful gift of his life. Perhaps he had.

"Most of my stuff's at Hogwarts," he said. "It's just clothes at home..." He looked a bit embarrassed, and Remus knew he was also thinking about the rude posters he had permanently affixed to his bedroom walls. You could be sure he would not be doing that in his new room at the Potter's.

"Well, you can borrow some of James's things for a little while. Perhaps we'll go shopping in the new year."

They sat down to a quiet Christmas lunch. Evidently, someone had disinvited the guests that had been planned for – which to Remus was a blessing. He was already worm thin from too much worry and not enough sleep; he did not need Darius Barebones thrown into the mix. He did think of the Pettigrews, and wonder if Peter was worried, or feeling left out.

Gully was just about to set light to the Christmas pudding when the *CRACK* of apparition sounded outside the front gate. Dumbledore. Sirius jumped, and looked as if he wanted to get up from the table, but stayed put. Mr Potter smiled at them all reassuringly and went to the door.

Everyone listened intently.

“Albus! Merry Christmas,”

“Fleamont. I take it Sirius has had his rest?”

“Yes, we were just about to have--”

“I did request that you contact me as soon as he woke up.”

“Come in, Dumbledore. Join us for some pudding.”

Dumbledore stalked into the room. He was wearing sombre robes in deep, brownish maroon, like dried blood. He looked as though his night had been just as long as theirs. He was followed in by a stocky man who resembled a rather grizzled bulldog. He had a mass of greyish-ginger hair, and mean dark eyes which darted furtively around the room, as if scouting for trouble.

“Albus, Alastor,” Mrs Potter got up, waving her wand. Two more chairs appeared at the dinner table, as well as small plates, forks, napkins and goblets. “Won’t you join us for pudding?”

“Not now, Effie,” The stocky man - Alastor - grunted, “On duty.”

She gave him a look, not dissimilar to the look she had given James last night. He cleared his throat and sat down, quickly. Remus smirked. He had to find out exactly how she did that. Mothers had their own magic, it seemed. Dumbledore took his place with more decorum. His expression, as ever, was still as a millpond and impossible to read. He was looking at Sirius.

There it was, Remus felt it settle around him like an old friend. Rage. The desire to lunge across the table and shake Dumbledore senseless was so strong, and so tangible, that he found himself gripping the seat of his chair.

The stranger, Alastor, turned to look at him. Remus felt himself being scanned by those dark, perceptive eyes. Oh. He knew Remus was a werewolf - Remus wasn’t sure how *he* knew that Alastor knew, but he did. There was no question. Remus raised his chin and looked him in the eye. Alastor smiled, slightly, as if this had confirmed something he had hoped for, then turned back to Dumbledore.

“Sirius,” their head teacher said, quietly, “How are you?”

“Fine.” Sirius nodded, staring at the big dark pudding at the centre of the table. Gully snapped his fingers and it caught alight, the blue flame shimmering like strange magical vapour.

“I’d like to discuss last night's events with you,” Dumbledore pressed, “I know it isn’t pleasant, and you may wish to forget, but anything you tell me might be useful, do you understand?”

“Yes. Fine.” Sirius nodded, expression unchanged.

The flame died, and Gully clicked his fingers again. The pudding divided neatly into eight portions. It was rich and moist and cloying, the fruit and brandy stuck in their throats. They ate quietly for a moment, before Mr Potter felt he had to speak.

“Not seeing your family today, Moody?”

Alastor shook his head.

“The job comes first. I’ll be here as long as you need me.”

“We’re very grateful.” Mrs Potter said, the kindness returning to her tone.

“Alastor is an Auror,” Mr Potter explained to the boys. Remus saw the light of recognition go on in James and Sirius’s eyes, and made a mental note to enquire later. If he had to guess, he assumed it meant some kind of wizard bodyguard. He thought of Charles Bronson in *Death Wish*, and imagined Alastor Moody with a gun.

Once pudding was eaten, they all returned to the living room. Sirius sat on the sofa, with James and Remus either side. They had sat in the same formation last Christmas, when Dumbledore had arrived to announce the deaths of the Frasers. Remus had not thought of the Frasers at all since then, not really – only as part of the ever-darkening backdrop of a war he would prefer not to worry about. He had so much else to distract him.

One of these distractions was sitting beside him, right now. Their knees knocked together occasionally; Sirius wouldn’t sit still. Remus tried not to flinch away, in case it was misread.

“I hope this will not take long.” Dumbledore smiled, pleasantly, as if this was nothing more than a friendly chat. “Sirius, we just need to know anything you can remember about the events which led to you arriving here at eleven fifteen last night.”

“Was that the time?” Sirius blinked, “I thought it was later.”

Dumbledore folded his hands in his lap and smiled.

“In your own time, please.”

“Er...” Sirius cleared his throat, and glanced at James, who smiled at him in a brotherly way. Sirius looked at Dumbledore again, “I thought it would be ok. I never really got on with my family that well... since I’m in Gryffindor, y’know. But they were... I thought it would be ok. We have a family dinner every year on Christmas Eve – the *whole* family.”

“Who was there?” Moody asked. He was taking notes, a quill hovered just at chest level, scribbling quickly onto a piece of floating parchment.

“All of the Blacks,” Sirius looked up at him, “And the Lestranges. The Malfoys – Narcissa and her husband, anyway. Not Andromeda, obviously. The... the Goyles arrived later. And the Notts. The Crabbes. Barty Crouch was visiting, he’s friends with my brother.”

“Crouch?!” Moody sounded surprised. Dumbledore smiled again, inclining his head,

“That would be Bartimus Junior, of course.”

“Yeah,” Sirius nodded. “Little git.”

“Quite the gathering, eh Albus?” Moody muttered.

“Quite. Please, Sirius, do go on.”

“So... yeah, it was all normal really. Normal for us. Dinner, dancing. Snobby stuff. They....” He paused, looking ashamed, “They toasted to Voldemort. I didn’t join in though, professor, I swear! It was sort of jokey, I don’t even know how serious they were. Dad was a bit drunk.”

Dumbledore’s expression did not change. Sirius was looking at his feet now, and kept talking, faster and faster.

“I was s’posed to talk to James at eight, so I tried to sort of sneak off. But my cousin - Bellatrix - she caught me, and cornered me in the library. She said as I was nearly of age, it was time I started taking my role as heir more seriously, leave my friends behind, and grow up. I told her to... well, I wasn’t very nice. She called my parents, Reg came in too. And Crouch.

‘I wasn’t worried, because... well everyone knows Bella’s a bit bonkers, so I thought they’d just tell her to stay out of it. But they didn’t; they sided with her. Dad said... he said he wanted me to make him proud for once. I told him I was trying, but. But... “

Sirius paused for breath. The silence was agony. He continued.

“Anyway. They wanted me to swear allegiance to Voldemort. I thought they were joking. They were saying all this mad stuff, about muggleborns, and blood traitors, and... then Bellatrix showed me her arm – she’s got this tattoo,” he looked up, as if realising this piece of information was useful, “It’s the dark mark, sir, the skull and snake. She said she’s chosen a side, and it was time for me to choose mine. I said no. I said it so many times.” He closed his eyes, looking down again.

“And they hurt you, for it?” Dumbledore prompted, “They tried to persuade you?”

“Yes.”

“Bellatrix did this?”

“No.”

“Your mother? Your father?”

Sirius’s breathing was very shallow, but he kept going. He nodded.

“They took turns.”

Mrs Potter stood up, suddenly, and left the room. Remus didn’t blame her. His urge to hit something was reaching critical levels.

“But you managed to escape?” Dumbledore pushed, gently.

Sirius nodded again,

“After a while, I must have stopped saying no, because... well it just hurt too much, I couldn’t say anything. They must have needed me to agree, because they left me there, they locked me in the library. But there’s a fireplace there, and floo powder. I dunno, maybe they wanted me to go.” He sounded very tired, now. But the story was told, and there was an air of relief.

“Thank you, Sirius.” Dumbledore said, very softly. “This has been a great help. I won’t disrupt your Christmas any further.” He stood, smoothly, and glanced at Mr Potter, “Your offer to house Sirius until he comes of age still stands, I assume?”

“As much as it did when he was twelve.” Mr Potter said, straightening his back. He was a head shorter than Dumbledore, but at that moment, Fleamont Potter was the tallest man in the room.

“Excellent.” Dumbledore nodded. “I shall see you boys in January, then.”

“Wait!” Sirius jumped up, “Professor – what about my brother?”

“Do you believe Regulus is in danger?”

“Er... I don’t think they’ll hurt him. He’s good at doing as he’s told, he only wants to please our parents. But they’ll make him join Voldemort, he’ll get marked – he’s sixteen next year, and–”

“Does Regulus want to leave?”

“I... no. Not like I did.”

“Then we cannot force him. He is in no immediate danger. I’m sorry, Sirius.”

Sirius hung his head, sat back down. Dumbledore left, quietly, shaking Mr Potter’s hand. Moody left too, returning to his station outside the Potter’s front gate. Remus watched him through the window. What a very strange man.

“Mr Potter,” Sirius said, unnaturally polite, “Please may I borrow some parchment? I’d like to write to Andromeda.”

“Of course, my boy.” Mr Potter nodded. He led Sirius and James into his study.

Remus stayed put, feeling that he wasn’t really needed just now. The Potters were there to support Sirius; they could do whatever was necessary. He, Remus, was only really useful when Sirius needed some sense slapped into him (verbally, of course), or when a prank needed ironing out. And there would be plenty of time for those things, once this particular storm had passed.

Again, Remus wished he could speak to Grant. There was definitely a phone box in town; if he wanted to, Remus could call St. Edmund’s, and Matron would probably hand the phone over; she wasn’t a jailor. But Moody was, and Remus didn’t much like the idea of explaining why he fancied a trip into the village on Christmas day.

He closed his eyes and tried to imagine what Grant might say. *Bloody hell!* Probably.

* * *

They went to bed early that night. There was nothing else to do – James didn’t even suggest flying practice. They played a few half-hearted games of chess, but everyone kept yawning so much that in the end it was ridiculous to try and stay up. They piled into James’s bed, even Remus. He tried to manoeuvre it so that James ended up in the middle, but Sirius crawled over them and plonked himself down between his two friends.

“Budge up, Moony,” he grinned, with a sharp elbow in the ribs.

Remus kept as close to the edge as possible. Touching Sirius underneath the covers, even with his toe was utterly unthinkable. *This is weird*, he thought. *Mates don’t share a bed. Even best mates. This is so weird...*

He tried to sleep. James began to snore, and Sirius’s breathing levelled out. Remus relaxed. He could *definitely* imagine what Grant would say to this. ‘I *knew* you boarding school lads were all poofs!’ Remus couldn’t help chuckling slightly, under his breath. Sirius rolled over to face him, eyes open, wide awake.

“What are you giggling at, Moony?”

“Nothing!” Remus whispered back, embarrassed. “Just not used to sharing a bed.”

“Yeah, James’s snoring is pretty bad.”

And it's weird, right?! Remus wanted to say, don't you think we're weird??

"Mm." Was all he said.

"I can't sleep." Sirius sighed.

"I could get James's mum? She might have some more potion."

"Don't want any more potion." Sirius sounded overtired and sulky, like a child. Remus was glad. That made him easier to deal with.

"Well. Just shut your eyes then." He instructed.

"I keep thinking about it."

"Oh. Sorry."

"No, not like that, I just mean... it's weird, but while they were doing it – before I sort of stopped thinking – I was thinking about you."

"Me?!"

"Yeah. I was thinking... *at least now I know how Moony feels*. When we were researching all that stuff to help you on the full moon, there was a description in one of the records, written by a witch who had lycanthropy. She said the pain of transformation was similar to the *cruciatus* curse."

"Oh. I never heard that. I don't think it can be, I think *cruciatus* must be much worse."

"Maybe." Sirius agreed. "But it helped, a bit. I thought – if Moony can do it, so can I."

Remus didn't have a proper response.

"Go to sleep, Sirius."

"All right. Night."

"Night."

He waited for Sirius to fall asleep – properly, this time – then carefully got up, and went back to his own bed.

Fifth Year: January

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Throw me a line, I'm sinking fast

Clutching at straws - can't make it

Havana sound we're trying,

hard edge, the hipster jiving

Last picture shows down the drive-in

You're so sheer - you're so chic;

Teenage rebel of the week

Sunday 4th January 1976

The rest of the Christmas break passed in a shaky, black and white sort of way. The Potters hosted a small gathering for New Year's Eve, but very few people came. Many of their close circle were now working for Dumbledore, Mrs Potter explained, and busy with the war effort. Whatever that was. Their peripheral friends had either turned their backs on the Potters ("we're blood traitors," James proudly declared) or else were simply too frightened to associate themselves.

Moody would not hear of Mrs Potter taking Sirius to Diagon Alley, but he needed shoes to begin the new term in, so they all sloped down to the village one afternoon. There, Sirius had fallen madly in love with a pair of brand new black Doc Martens, with bright yellow laces. Remus was pretty jealous; his own pair had been knock-offs from down the market, and had fallen apart long ago.

On their way back from town, they'd passed a couple of punks - a very odd sight in this little country village, but Remus supposed there were teenagers everywhere. One of them had a row of heavy silver rings in the cartilage of one ear. The other had green hair.

Mrs Potter had forbidden any dyeing of hair, but the night before school was due to begin, Remus had relented after hours of Sirius's begging, and helped him pierce one of his earlobes using his prefect pin and a potato. It had bled - a lot, but Sirius was thrilled.

Thus he presented himself before Remus the morning they were setting off for London - he had messed up his hair for volume, flipped it over one shoulder to show off his new gold earring, stood with his legs apart like a guitarist, hands in his pockets, big black bovver boots,

"Muggle insight," he grinned at Remus, putting a cigarette between his teeth, "How do I look?"

"Like a twat." James said.

"Like a rock star." Remus said, groaning inwardly. He was doomed.

He had thought (hoped, really) that Sirius's trauma might have cooled Remus's considerable

ardour towards his best friend. Might jolt him into realising that – as friendship was all they would *ever* have – he ought to focus his energies on just being a bloody good friend. But no. Sirius was a demi-god, and Remus was helpless to do anything but worship him. *You silly, lovesick prat*, he told himself.

At any rate, Remus was glad to be going back to Hogwarts, where lines were very clearly drawn, and there were exams to focus on.

Sirius turned heads at King's Cross. Muggles didn't give him half a glance, but wizards - or, more accurately, witches – stared. Mary came clacking over to him on the platform in a pair of turquoise suede boots with a heel that brought her up to his height.

“Hiya gorgeous!” She chirped, then hugged him fiercely, and Remus caught the look on his face over her shoulder. He looked pleased.

It must be nice, after a hard time, to hold someone in your arms like that. Especially someone as emotionally open as Mary. Remus allowed his own pain to peak, then subside, slowly, concentrating on smiling and listening to Marlene tell him all about her Christmas.

Once aboard, they bundled into their usual carriage, and Remus would be forever thankful to Lily, who suggested that he join her in patrolling the length of the train a few times.

“You looked like you could do with some air,” she smiled up at him.

“Yeah, cheers. Stuffy in there.”

“Full on Christmas with the marauders, then?”

“You can say that again.”

“Poor Remus.” She linked her arm with his, leaning against him slightly. It felt nice, like a mini cuddle. She had a small, soft sort of body. Maybe that was the attraction with girls.

“I heard about Sirius,” she said, very quietly. “Is he ok?”

“Yeah,” Remus nodded, “Think so. How did you know?”

“Er... Sev told me, actually. I didn't believe him, but based on Sirius's new look...”

“Fuck. How does he know?”

Lily shrugged.

“Does everyone know?”

“Only that he's been kicked out. And disinherited. No one knows why.” She was looking at him, and he realised she wanted him to tell her why.

“It's complicated.” He said, “I don't think he'd want everyone to know.”

“You're a good friend.” She patted his arm.

Yeah, he thought, bitterly. *I'm a great friend, me. All I think about is Sirius. Sirius's safety. Sirius's happiness. Sirius's hands, Sirius's neck, Sirius's mouth, Sirius throwing me down on the bed and--- Stop. Nope. Not the time. Fuck's sake.*

“Oi!” Lily was shouting, suddenly, pointing down the long corridor of the moving train, “If that’s you, Crouch, I’ll have your guts for garters...”

Barty Crouch. Remus’s stomach turned. He had been there, on Christmas Eve . Nasty little creep. The fair haired fourteen year old was tormenting some first year girls, levitating their book bags over their heads. Lily, ever fearless, marched over, threatening detention, loss of points, even a few hexes. He sneered at her, but let the bags drop.

“Barty, what are you--oh.” The door of the nearest compartment slid open, and Regulus Black appeared. His eyes narrowed at Lily, “What do you want, Evans?”

“No need to be so rude,” she tutted. She raised an eyebrow at Crouch, “Stay out of trouble, or I’ll be speaking with Slughorn. You’re on thin ice already and you know it. C’mon, Remus,” she glanced back at Lupin, who was still standing a little way back, hoping to avoid doing his perfectly duty.

Regulus’s head snapped back, he stared at Remus and all of the arrogance vanished. He looked so much younger.

“Lupin.” He said, stiffly.

Remus just nodded. Regulus opened his mouth once or twice. He obviously wanted to ask. Remus wanted to hit him. But not in front of Lily. He remembered Sirius’s desperate concern for his brother and saw it reflected back at him in Regulus’s eyes.

“He’s fine.” Remus blurted out.

Regulus blinked, then nodded, then turned back into his car, slamming the door. Barty scratched his head in shock, looking very confused.

* * *

Thursday 15th January 1976

As the second term got into full swing, Remus realised he needn’t have worried so much. He didn’t even have to try to avoid Sirius. OWLs were just around the corner now, scheduled to begin in May, and if the fifth year students thought their workload had been heavy during the first term, they were in for a very rude awakening.

Remus combatted this added stress by spending every spare hour he could in the library, or in the common room perfecting practical spells. By the third week, he found that he had somehow become the unelected leader of a sort of homework and revision club – a group of fifth years, and even some younger students, had started coming to him for tips or advice on their own work.

“Lupin! What’s the flicky bit you do for locomotive spells? I keep doing it wrong...”

“Remus, Remus, is it ‘*Apar-E-cium*’ , or ‘*A-PAR-ecium*’ ?”

“Hey, Lupin, can you show me how you did that timeline, again? I keep forgetting...”

Remus pretended that he found the whole thing a huge imposition, but he was secretly thrilled. He was *good* at something. The marauders – when he saw them – thought it was hilarious, and had taken to calling him ‘professor’.

One student in particular had started joining him for regular study sessions – a fourth year

Gryffindor called Christopher Barley. He was quiet and studious, with serious dark eyes and long, slender fingers. He was shy, but when Remus said hello to him he gave an incredible smile, lighting up from the inside.

Remus realised after the third or fourth time he bumped into Christopher somewhere in the castle 'by coincidence', that the younger boy had a crush on him. *I'm getting better at this*, he thought, guiltily. The feeling was, unfortunately, not at all mutual. Remus was flattered, of course – it was hard not to be – but he couldn't summon up any feelings beyond sympathy for Christopher. Neither of them were brave enough to say anything, which was just as well

On top of this, Remus had his prefect duties, which seemed to multiply with each week. After a Hufflepuff (and muggleborn) prefect had been hexed before Christmas while on a nightly patrol, and not been found until the morning, the heads of each house demanded that prefects patrol in pairs at all times.

These patrols had become a nightly farce, for Remus, as he spent most of the time trying to direct Lily away from wherever the other three marauders were out of bed, working on some nefarious scheme or other. This worked most of the time.

The problem was, that since Christmas James and Sirius had become more daring than ever. Armed with the marauder's map and the invisibility cloak, they navigated the castle like a pair of pirates, pillaging and laying waste. Several times, Remus would get back from patrol and find them not in their beds - only for the two boys to return an hour later, laughing and full of bravado, telling him how they had almost been caught this time, *almost*.

Quidditch, too, kept them busy and apart from Remus. The match with Slytherin had been the first game of the year, and resulted in a tie, which meant that both houses were now competing ruthlessly for the cup. With James now at the helm, the Gryffindor team was practicing twice as often every week, and Potter was dragging Sirius out every morning at the crack of dawn for a jog.

In fact, between Remus's desire to study, his group of disciples and his prefect duties, his scant free time barely ever seemed to coincide with that of his friends'. He barely saw them at mealtimes, or before bed - except for Peter, whose only extracurricular activity was his girlfriend.

So it came as something of a surprise one night in mid-January when Remus bumped into Sirius. It was a routine patrol, and Remus and Lily's last of the week. The full moon was due in two days, and Remus had cunningly manipulated the prefect's rota to avoid those nights. He had offered to take charge of the rota for their house, in fact - and the rest of the Gryffindor prefects were obviously relieved. They were all good at their jobs, of course, with a strong sense of justice and fairness, combined with the courage to do the right thing - but few Gryffindors could ever be bothered with the admin. Remus seized this opportunity, and it had so far served him well.

"Come on now," Lily said, as they descended the flight of stairs from the Astronomy tower - usually a hotspot for after-curfew activity, tonight it was deserted - "The main ingredients in a calming draught, list them."

"Err..." Remus huffed, as his hip clicked on the last stair. He was just glad he had a lot of energy shortly before the moon, "Lacewing flies, dew from a field of clover, sea water, and... um..."

"Oh come on, Remus!" Lily sighed, exasperated, "This is fourth year stuff!"

"I know, but I can never---wait, did you hear that?"

"What?"

“Sh!”

He was sure he had heard a sigh, or a gasp, and now, in the perfect silence, he was aware that he could hear two more heartbeats nearby, pounding hard. And the scent of something else, something exciting and heady. He ripped back the nearest tapestry, raising his wand.

“*Lumos* !”

“Shit!”

“Mary!” Lily gasped.

“Moony!” Sirius said.

“What are you two doing?!” Lily said, immediately adopting her authoritative voice, which Remus thought was eerily close to McGonagall’s.

“Can’t guess, Evans?” Sirius winked at her. His arms were still protectively wrapped around Mary’s waist, his hair had fallen forward untidily and his mouth was redder than usual. Mary’s blouse was unbuttoned almost down to her navel, and she was hurriedly trying to cover up.

“We ought to give you both detention,” Lily raised an eyebrow at her friend,

“Oh, be nice, Lily,” Mary cajoled, a soft smile on her lips, “Everyone does it, just a bit of fun.”

“Well... as this is the first time,” Lily relented, “Come on, we’re heading back to the Tower now anyway.”

“Five more minutes?” Sirius asked, cheekily, much to Lily’s horror. Mary laughed and slapped him playfully.

“Bad boy!” She giggled, buttoning up her shirt. “C’mon, it’s not like anything else was happening tonight.”

The four of them walked back to Gryffindor common room together, the girls giggling and whispering together, occasionally sneaking glances back at Sirius, before bursting into giggles all over again. Sirius played up to this, walking with an exaggerated swagger, tucking his long hair behind one ear and winking at them when they looked. He tried to catch Remus’s eye a few times, as if to let him in on the joke, but Remus kept looking forward and said nothing.

“Alright, Moony?” Sirius asked, when they were all in their beds and still had not spoken. He sounded a bit worried now. *Good*, thought Remus.

“Yeah.” Remus replied, rolling over and closing his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the Beginning is 'Virginia Plain' by Roxy Music. Party classic.

Fifth Year: Hurt Feelings

Chapter Summary

CW for mention of homophobia.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Monday 18th January 1976

Remus Lupin had absolutely no interest whatsoever in the Forbidden Forest at any other time of the month. Care of Magical Creatures had given him a healthy respect for the beasts who lived there, and he was inclined to give them a wide berth.

The wolf clearly felt otherwise. James and Sirius - or rather, Prongs and Padfoot as they were now known - had very little trouble leading the werewolf out of the shack and into the green velvet darkness of the woods. Remus's memories of the full moons were much better than they ever had been - but still not quite human, and therefore less complete. He remembered scents, shapes, noises and even tastes, sometimes.

"We can't stop you chasing rabbits if you want to chase rabbits," James shrugged, when Remus woke up that morning distressed by the blood on his tongue. "You seemed pretty happy about it at the time."

"It was bloody good fun," Sirius put in, licking his own lips.

"You were encouraging me!" Remus accused, pulling his trousers on underneath his blanket. "You ought to know better, you have self control!"

"Yeah," Sirius shrugged, "But when I'm a dog, I'm a dog. It's what we do."

That was Sirius all over. Have all the fun and take no responsibility.

"Don't worry, Moony," James yawned, "We wouldn't ever let you hurt a person. And you *did* have fun, I promise."

He didn't need James to tell him that. As much as the human Remus preferred to remain aloof, and separate himself from those baser instincts the wolf represented, he couldn't wait for the next moon.

"You'd better be off," he yawned back, "See if you can get a bit of kip before breakfast."

"Yeah, all right," James nodded sleepily, "See ya, Moony."

"Bye Prongs."

'Prongs' had been a stroke of genius one afternoon, when Peter had forgotten the word for 'antlers'. They'd all laughed so hard the name had stuck. Remus wasn't sure where 'Padfoot' had come from. Likely a private joke between James and Sirius. Anyway, it made sense, and they had

settled into their new names comfortably, sealing them into the marauder's map.

Madam Pomfrey gave him the once over when he arrived, then just sent him on his way.

"I don't even need the stretcher anymore," she marvelled, "And you've got a good colour in your cheeks. Rest this morning, but if you're feeling up to it you may as well attend your afternoon lessons."

He felt terrible for lying to her about the reason for his miraculous recoveries, but it couldn't be helped.

Remus managed to sleep through the rest of the morning, and awoke a bit too early for lunch. He went down to the common room to sit by an open window and smoke while he went over his history notes for the afternoon. All things considered, he thought to himself, other than the Sirius problem, life was going pretty well.

Sirius had bungled an apology, about the Astronomy Tower incident - Remus heavily suspected this was a result of a conference with James.

"Sorry, Moony, I should have checked with you, or used the map or something, I *know* you hate all that girl stuff, and I know you've done loads to keep us out of trouble this year..."

Remus had put on a great show of mulling this apology over, then forgiving his friend, because anything else would have been highly suspicious. He was mortified when even Mary came to offer her own apology, and spluttered that he hadn't minded in the least.

He liked Mary. He didn't want to feel this way about her; none of it was her fault, exactly. And, as James so often said, Sirius deserved a bit of fun, considering the year he was having.

"Hiya, Remus!" A small voice interrupted his thoughts. he realised he hadn't so much as glanced at his notes yet, and his cigarette had burnt all the way down, unsmoked.

"Hi, Christopher," Remus nodded, frowning as he brushed the ash off his sleeve. "Y'ok?"

"Yeah," the younger boy grinned and hopped up to join him on the window seat. He was smaller than Remus - but so was everyone. "What are you up to?"

"History." Remus said, through his teeth as he lit another fag.

"Cool!" Christopher grinned. Remus raised an eyebrow, but said nothing. "I won't bother you, then." Christopher said, hopefully. "If you're busy."

"What's up?" Remus asked, not wanting to hurt his feelings. There were enough hurt feelings in the world and he refused to be responsible for anyone's but his own.

"Um, well, nothing really. It's a Hogsmeade weekend, this weekend."

"Yeah, I know," Remus shifted uncomfortably in the seat. Surely Christopher wouldn't be so gauche as to ask him out?! He had to nip it in the bud at once, "I er... I'm going with my mates, y'know."

"Oh, right. Er... James Potter and Sirius Black and that other one..."

"Mm."

He could tell that Christopher - like most of the younger Gryffindors - teetered between awe and

fear where the marauders were concerned. They were simply *so* daring, and *so* successful, it was intimidating.

“Well I was just thinking, that’s all.” Christopher cleared his throat, “You know how we were talking about that new Arithmancy book, i thought we could see if anywhere was stocking it yet.”

“Sorry, Christopher,” Remus said, as gently as possible, “I really am busy... er... maybe another time?”

“Ok. Yeah, of course...”

Christopher looked crestfallen. Remus felt bad, but what else could he do? and he really did have plans - not with the marauders, actually; he had another phone call planned with Grant. After the incident with Sirius and Mary Remus had hastily scribbled down a request to speak with Grant and sent it to Matron first thing the next morning. He somewhat regretted to now, having calmed down a fair bit - but was still looking forward to speaking with Grant if he could.

“Hiya Moony!” Sirius came bounding across the common room from the portrait hole he’d just entered through. He leaned against the wall beside Remus and Christopher, grinning that Sirius Black grin.

“Hi Padfoot,” Remus smiled back - he hoped he didn’t look at Sirius the way Christopher looked at him. That would be embarrassing.

“So, settle a bet for me and Prongs,” Sirius began, completely ignoring Christopher, who got up and mumbled a goodbye, before making a hasty exit. Sirius wasted no time in flinging himself into the empty space on the window seat, “How many nifflers would we need to find Rowena Ravenclaw’s lost diadem?”

“What the fuck is a diadem?” Remus smirked.

“Like a crown.” Sirius snatched Remus’s newly lit cigarette and held it to his own lips. Remus had to struggle not to moan at the sight. He simply took out a third cigarette.

“Why,” he said, inhaling deeply, “Would you and James want a crown?”

“Dunno,” Sirius shrugged, “Finding treasure seems like a marauder-type pursuit. Hey, what did that kid want?”

“Christopher.”

“Ah, he in your fan club?”

“Study group.”

“Pfft. What did he want?”

“He was asking me out,” Remus replied, dryly. Looking out of the window. Apparently not dryly enough - when he looked back at Sirius, his mouth was agape. *Oh god, Sirius’s mouth.* “Joking, Padfoot,” Remus said, with a smirk. He had perfected sarcastic smirks.

Sirius snorted.

“Good one, Moony. Thought you were serious there.”

Remus considered saying ‘no, *you’re* Sirius’, but that joke had been wearing thin since first year,

and would only earn him a punch in the arm. He settled for a shrug and another pull on his fag.

“If you did fancy going out with someone, though,” Sirius said, slyly, “Who d’you reckon? Lily or Marlene?”

“Shut up.” Remus rolled his eyes.

“You’re right,” Sirius continued, conversationally, “Lily’s taken - I mean, she doesn’t know she’s taken, of course... so Marlene it is! Hogsmeade on Saturday?”

“Are you asking me out on Marlene’s behalf?”

“Maybe.”

“No.”

“I can get her to ask you out herself, if you want, I just thought you’d say yes to me.”

I’d say yes to you . Remus thought, pathetically.

“Marlene’s not interested in me.” He said. This, he had decided, was better than saying ‘*I’m* not interested in *her*’ - because of course that would only invite the question ‘why not?’

“‘Course she is, you’re friends, aren’t you? Anyway,. you have to come, we’re doing it to support James.”

“Now James is involved.” Remus stubbed out his cigarette and stood up, shoving his history notes into his bag. they obviously weren’t getting read now. “Lunch?” He said.

“Yep.” Sirius nodded, flicked his own cigarette out of the window and stood up. They headed for the portrait hole. “Yes, James is involved,” Sirius continued, as they made their way to the Great Hall. “We all need to be there - and ideally coupled up - so that he can ask Evans out.”

“James asks Lily out once a week.”

“True,” Sirius nodded, “But this time he’s going in with a game plan.”

“Oh?”

“He’s got a song and everything.”

“James writes songs?!” Remus’s mask dropped for a moment in genuine surprise.

“Well,” Sirius licked his lips, “I may have given him a hand... anyway, we all need to have dates, to plant the idea in her mind. Like that muggle psychology stuff.”

“As much as I’d love to see James make a prat out of himself in the name of true love,” Remus laughed, “I’m busy on Saturday.”

“Doing what?”

“None of your business,”

“See, Moony,” Sirius sighed, “This is why the girls can’t get enough of you, so mysterious.”

Remus wasn’t sure if Sirius was making a cruel joke, so he left it there. They walked quietly for a

little bit. "Hey, Moony?" Sirius started again.

"Yes?"

"Do you fancy Mary?"

"What?!"

They had stopped just outside the lunch hall, and Remus spun around to face Sirius in shock. Sirius looked embarrassed, fiddled with his earring,

"Well you've been a bit... off since we started going out. And I've hardly seen you since the, er... the tapestry fiasco."

Remus snorted.

"No. I do not fancy Mary."

"Ok good," Sirius smiled at him. "So you'll be Marlene's date?"

"Still busy, sorry."

* * *

Saturday 31st January 1976

Remembering that the last time he had tried to have a private phone call he had been followed, Remus asked to borrow James's cloak for their trip into Hogsmeade. Good old James - you could rely on him not to ask loads of questions. Especially when he was distracted by his nerves over asking Lily out.

"Yeah, 'course Moony, 'course..." he murmured, staring at himself in the mirror, "It's under the bed. Hey, would you say my hair needs trimming? Looks a bit untidy?"

"It does look untidy," Remus said, from under the bed, "But a trim won't help. Don't worry, girls think it's charming."

"Yeah? Yeah, you're right..."

"You've asked her out before," Remus said, emerging with the cloak and brushing the dust from his robes, "How can you be nervous?"

"Because I'm bloody mad about her." James replied, without missing a beat. "You know when you just can't get 'em out of your mind, and in your head it's great, and everything's going the way you want - but then they're there, in front of you, and... well it all goes to shit, because she's just so much more spectacular in real life, y'know?"

"Yeah." Remus mrmurded, thumbing the fabric of the invisibility cloak as Sirius exited the bathroom.

Down in the village, Remus wished James good luck before disappearing into the gent's at the Three Broomsticks, throwing on the cloak and then walking straight out again. This time he was able to arrive at the old muggle phone box at exactly the right time, and excitedly keyed in the number.

"Oi oi, happy new year and all that," Grant's voice rattled up the wire. Remus beamed,

“Happy new year! I had a card for you, but I never sent it. Sorry.”

“S’long as you remember my birthday.”

“Oh! Er, ok, when is it?”

Grant barked with laughter,

“I’m *joking* you silly sod. I never sent you no card either.”

“Oh!”

“Still taking ya’self too seriously, then.”

“Yeah,” Remus chuckled, “I s’pose. How are you?”

“Shit.” Grant replied, his voice going slightly high as he inhaled - Remus guessed he was smoking.

“Bloody terrible, actually. But don’t you worry. My problem.”

“No, tell me, go on. I might be able to help.”

“Just Matron. Don’t worry. Hey, how are things with your posho loverboy? Over it yet?”

“No.” Remus sighed, “Worse, if anything.”

“Yeah, thought as much.”

“You said it wouldn’t last!”

“Lied to make you feel better.”

Remus couldn’t help but laugh. Thank god for Grant.

“I feel like I’m going mad.” He said, whispering into the phone the secrets he hadn’t been able to say out loud. “I feel like I’m just going to do something crazy. He’s so...”

“Be careful.” Grant warned, “Remember what I said.”

“Yeah,” Remus sighed again. “So, how was your Christmas?”

“Crap. I was s’posed to go to me gran’s, but grandad cancelled it at the last minute. Didn’t want his nancy-boy grandson showing him up in front of the neighbours. Next time I see him, I’ll wear a dress.”

“Sorry, Grant.” Remus said, quietly, feeling even worse about not having sent the card.

“Aww shuddup,” Grant replied, and Remus could tell he was smiling, “Like I said, not your problem. Oi, I might not be here much longer, though. I’m er... probably going to be moved on. Haven’t exactly been going to school...”

“Where will you go?!”

“Dunno. Think I’m done with ‘omes. Might go up London, got some mates there.”

“How will I find you?”

“Bless ya.” Grant said, “Forgot how sweet you was. You could gimme your address an’ I’ll do my

best to write?"

"I... can't." Remus felt a horrible tearing on the inside. "I'm really sorry, I wish I could, I really do... my school isn't really a normal sort of school, and... well it's not really possible."

"Well. That's that, then." Grant replied.

* * *

Remus trudged back to the village with a heavy heart. All that obsessing over Sirius had come to nothing, and now he was at risk of losing someone just as important. Someone who actually fancied him back, too. Apparently Remus was only interested in people he couldn't have. He would look up locating spells, as soon as possible, he decided. He wasn't going to lose track of Grant like that.

He was mildly cheered upon entering the Three Broomsticks to see Snape sitting in a corner, alone, glaring about the room. Remus went straight back into the gent's, removed the cloak and then walked out, being sure to catch Severus's eye. The Slytherin boy nearly fell off his bar stool in surprise. Remus smirked as he walked over to join his friends.

They were all there - Peter and Desdemona, Sirius and Mary, Marlene, James and Lily. Lily looked very pink in the face, but very smug, and James was looking at the bottom of his empty glass. He was dripping wet, and smelled sickly sweet. Evidently, the serenade had not gone down well.

"Moony!" Sirius boomed, invitingly, "You missed all the fun!"

"Yeah, sorry," Remus smiled at everyone politely, pulling out his own chair. Sirius motioned to the pretty barmaid for another butterbeer. "Er..." Remus glanced at James, then Lily. "How is... everyone?"

Peter let out a strange, high pitched giggle, then clamped his hand over his mouth. Sirius raised an eyebrow.

"Oh, quite well, Moony, quite well... I was just saying, it's been a while since the marauders have done a proper prank."

"You put stink bombs under the rug in the Slytherin common room last week." Lily said.

"And yesterday you reversed the lenses on all of the telescopes in the Astronomy Tower." Marlene said.

"And you said that tomorrow you were planning to--" Mary started, but Sirius rolled his eyes,

"Yeah yeah, but those things are child's play." He said, decidedly. "Plus, that was just me and James mucking about. A *proper* marauder prank needs all four of us."

"Remus doesn't want to join in with your silly pranks," Lily said.

"Yes I do." Remus replied - partly because he was in a bad mood and felt contrary, partly out of solidarity for poor James, who still had butterbear dripping from the end of his nose.

Not sure about other countries, but in the UK 'the gent's' is short for 'the gentleman's toilets'. :P

Fifth Year: Dung Bombs & Broom Cupboards

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*She's like a live bombshell,
Like a flash out of hell!
And when she's shaking her - ooh!
Everyone fell
at her feet
And that's neat
and she took me complete-ly
By surprise with her ultrasonic eyes
That were flashing like hysterical danger signs!
That said 'beware where you tread',
Or you'll go out of your head!
Look out!
She's a hell raiser, star chaser, trailblazer
Natural born raver, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
She's a hell raiser, star chaser, trailblazer
Natural born raver, yeah, yeah, yeah
Look out!*

Monday 23rd February 1976

It was a simple enough prank to begin with - good old fashioned dung bombs. But Sirius's high spirits at the prospect of all four marauders working together again meant that the idea kept growing and expanding, until it somehow involved four-hundred dungbombs, a timing delay spell, and all four of them out of bed after curfew.

They'd put it off long enough. Even if Remus agreed to forgo his homework for an evening, they had to gather the materials (he didn't ask where they got their hands on four hundred dungbombs. Best not to know), and then contend with quidditch practice and the prefect patrol rota. Then there was a full moon. All told, the first night all of them were available ended up being at the end of February.

"Been a while!" James grinned as he disappeared under the cloak.

Peter's ability to turn into a rat was incredibly useful, especially when he could shrink down and

rest on James's shoulder under the invisibility cloak. Unfortunately, tall as they all were now, three was still too many to properly fit.

"You two use the cloak," Remus sighed, pulling it off after trying to squat low enough so that it didn't show their ankles, "I'll just flash my prefect pin if anyone asks what I'm doing."

"Takes all the fun out of it, though." Sirius complained, slightly muffled under the fabric.

"I'm sure you'll still find a way to have fun," Remus said. "Come on then."

They left the dorm room and made their way down the stairs to leave Gryffindor Tower. Remus had to walk slowly so that the others could keep up, but he was anxious to get it over with. It was a good idea and everything - but it was going to take most of the night if they wanted all of their bases covered, and he had an early start on Tuesday.

"Hiya, Remus!"

No sooner had they turned a corner than they had bumped into Christopher. This was getting ridiculous. Everywhere he turned, if Snape wasn't watching him, then Christopher was. Remus steeled himself and smiled broadly, deeply conscious that the three marauders stood just behind him, invisible.

"Hi Christopher, how's it going?"

"Not bad!" The delighted boy chirped back, "I was just going to the common room, fancy a game of chess?"

"Er... sorry, I'm on patrol." Remus tapped his metal badge.

"Oh right. Where's Lily, then?"

"In the loo." He said, quickly. "I'm just waiting for her."

"I'll wait with you!" Christopher grinned. Remus fought the urge to slap his forehead in disbelief.

"Oh no," he laughed, trying to keep his tone friendly, "No, you go off to the common room... it's nearly curfew, I don't want to have to give you detention!"

"Oh, ok then." Christopher nodded. Remus only ever disappointed him. "See you later, maybe? I forgot to say, I'm so excited about your party!"

"My what?!"

There was a low groan of annoyance just behind Remus. Fortunately, Christopher didn't seem to hear it.

"Your birthday party! I can't wait, I couldn't come to Sirius Black's party in November, I had a Potions essay due, but this year I'll make sure to get everything out of the way first!"

"T'riffic," Remus replied, giving him a thumbs up. *Just go away, for god's sake!* "See you there, then."

Christopher bounced off, quite happily. Remus smirked and turned to the invisible boys over his shoulder.

"My party, eh?"

"It was supposed to be a surprise!" James whispered.

"Who *is* that little git, anyway?!" Sirius asked.

"Leave him alone," Remus tutted, "He's just friendly."

"Such a benevolent professor." James laughed. "He'll be bringing you apples next."

"Well, one of you should tell him I prefer chocolate, then," Remus replied, breezily, as they made their way further along the hallway

They distributed the dung bombs as quickly as they could, and Remus performed the timing delay incantation - something he had been playing around with for a while. The key was making sure the dungbombs were scattered equally throughout the castle, in order to cause maximum chaos.

"I've spaced the times out at hourly intervals," Remus explained quietly, "I reckon it should take Filch about an hour to clear away the first lot, so as soon as he's finished the second lot will go off... then the third."

"We'll never make fun of you again, Moony," Sirius promised. "You bloody legend."

"Yeah, well as long as no one knows it was me." He laughed, "I've got my reputation to think of."

"Ooh yeah, can't have little Christopher finding out his hero is a bad boy, can we?"

Remus elbowed him sharply in the side.

"Hurry up," Peter - now human - said, wringing his hands, "I promised I'd try and say goodnight to Dezzie before curfew... can we do the Ravenclaw floor next?"

"Ah, young love," James chuckled, "Giving your girlfriend a goodnight kiss as your friends booby trap her exit points..."

"She thinks it's funny," Peter shrugged, slightly pink.

"Oi, Pete, how far have you got with Desdemona, anyway?" Sirius asked brusquely.

Peter blinked wildly a few times. He was not used to being so addressed by Sirius - who had lately been asking him all sorts of questions since beginning his relationship with Mary. Remus had the idea that Sirius saw it all as an extension of the snogging competition.

"Err... what do you mean?"

"You know," Sirius continued, juggling a few dungbombs carelessly, "Over the clothes or under the clothes, above the waist or below the--"

"Nothing like that!" Peter was bright red now. "And... it's none of your business anyway."

"Oh go on, I'll tell you how far I've got with MacDonald."

"I don't want to kno--"

"She's let me feel up her--"

"Ok, finished!" Remus said, loudly. "Next stop, Ravenclaw!"

It took them almost another hour, and it was well past curfew by the time they had finished everything.

“In hindsight,” James yawned, “We should have started laying them further from the common room and worked our way back.”

Remus nodded drowsily.

“We did it, though!” Sirius cheered. “The marauders are back!”

“We never went anywhere,” Peter muttered. He was still annoyed for having been put on the spot earlier.

They were over halfway back when Remus caught Mrs Norris’s scent. He shushed the others, and Peter quickly transformed into a rat, more out of nervousness than anything. James was just raising the cloak to cover them all, when the cat appeared, mewing disdainfully at them. Sirius, still full of energy, winked at James,

“Watch this!” and turned into a dog. He barked three times, and Mrs Norris turned tail and ran. Sirius turned back, laughing hysterically.

“Who’s there?!” Filch’s voice echoed around the same corner.

“You’ve done it now!” Remus moaned, “You idiot!”

“Run!” James said, and set off at full pelt towards the common room, Peter squeaking behind him. Remus tried to keep up, but his hip wouldn’t allow it, and he was soon out of breath. Sirius hung back with him, much to his annoyance,

“Go!” He panted, waving a hand at Sirius, “I might not get in trouble, but *you* will, don’t slow down...”

“Nonsense, Moony,” Sirius said, looking around quickly. His face lit up, “In here!” Sirius grabbed Remus by the wrist and yanked him into a nearby broom cupboard, closing the door as quietly as possible.

“Perfect.” Remus hissed, annoyed, snatching back his hand, “Now if we get caught they’ll *know* we were up to something.”

“Oh, relax will you?” Sirius retorted, “The worst we’ll get is detention. You used to get loads of detentions, you used to be *fun* .”

“Well I’m *sorry* if my idea of fun doesn’t involved spending all night stuck in a cupboard with you!” Remus whispered back, hotly. It was dark, and he knew Sirius couldn’t see him as well as Remus could see Sirius.

“*Lumos* !” Sirius whispered, lighting his wand point and rummaging in his pocket. There wasn’t much room, and he kept jostling into Remus’s hip.

“What are you doing now!?” Remus snapped, trying to edge away as much as possible. Why couldn’t he have ended up trapped with James? Or Peter? Peter would have been perfect.

“Calm your tits,” Sirius grunted, “I’ve got the map... hang on.. aha!” He withdrew the blank parchment from his back pocket, and tapped it with his wand, “I solemnly swear that I am up to no good...”

Nothing.

Sirius cleared his throat, “Ahem. I solemnly swear that I am up to no good... Moony, it’s broken.”

“Or that’s just a bit of old parchment and someone else has the map.” Remus suggested.

“Potter! I’ll bloody kill him.”

“No, it’s good.” Remus said, thinking fast, “If James has it, then he can find us. Or at least he knows where we are.”

“Oh, yeah I suppose you’re right. Think we should wait, then?”

“Well since you’ve put us in a corner, I don’t think we have a choice.”

Sirius sighed, heavily. Remus felt his breath against his collar bone. He tried to twist away again, feeling an alarming tightening in his trousers.

“Godric,” Sirius huffed, “What is your problem?!”

“What?!” Remus reacted, surprised.

“You’ve been dragging your heels about this prank for ages, avoiding me and James since Christmas--”

“I’ve been revising and you’ve had quidditch! We’re not twelve anymore, we can’t spend all our time together.”

“Seem to spend plenty of time with Evans.”

“We’re prefects together, she helps me with potions.”

“And the mood?”

“What mood?”

“You! You’ve been grumpy all year.”

Remus was pretty miffed to be called ‘moody’ by Gryffindor’s resident drama queen, but he held his tongue. It was no good getting into a fight, not when you were so close your knees were knocking together.

“It’s nothing. Exam stress.”

“I don’t believe you.” Sirius said, defiantly. His wand had gone out, but he was looking right at Remus. Maybe he *could* see in the dark. Dogs could, couldn’t they? His eyes burned like filaments. “Something’s *wrong*, Moony, tell me.”

“Nothing’s wrong. Leave it alone, will you?”

“Ok.” Sirius replied, his voice softer now, less aggressive. “Ok, but I wish you’d tell me. You used to tell me your secrets.”

“Look, this isn’t the time.” Remus whispered, closing his eyes and turning his head away. “We’re about to get caught out of bed and probably get a month of detentions. We need to be quiet.”

He felt Sirius nod, and they said no more.

He could come up with an excuse, Remus thought, for the mood. If exam stress didn't work, then maybe mention the war. The marauders hadn't really discussed it in detail, and it *was* on Remus's mind, so he hoped that was more believable. But he didn't want to remind Sirius, after everything he'd already been through. He *had* considered mentioning his Snape problem - but was equally concerned about Sirius's reaction to that. He'd been getting in enough trouble, lately, and Remus didn't want anyone going after Severus on his account. He'd deal with that himself.

Some nights, when he couldn't sleep, Remus had even mulled over the possibility of claiming he *did* have a crush on Mary. He was sure that Sirius would be understanding, and it seemed like an easy way out. Or else he could pretend Grant was a girl, and tell them all about that. He had decided not to, and felt guilt for even coming up with the idea. It was dishonest at best, and disrespectful at worst, even if Grant never found out.

There was nothing to do but wait for it to pass.

God, it was warm, squashed up in a cupboard like that. Remus did everything he could to keep his back pressed hard against the wall. There was barely any room at all; if Sirius so much as stepped forward an inch they would be touching, and if - horror of horrors - they came into contact anywhere below the waist he would find out that Remus was stiff as a rod.

It was torture.

"Moony?" Sirius whispered, so quietly Remus thought he might have imagined it. But he was looking up at him, a strange look on his face, "Are you--"

Suddenly, blessedly, the door swung open, to reveal James grinning at them, Wormtail on his shoulder.

"Having fun, lads?"

Remus could have kissed him.

"Our hero," he smiled weakly.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Hellraiser' by The Sweet. Glam rock heaven.

Fifth Year: Sweet Sixteen

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tuesday 9th March 1976

It was a miracle of epic proportions that none of them were caught – and even more miraculous that their prank went off without a hitch the next day, resulting in a morning off lessons while Filch dealt with the terrible stench. The rest of the classes took place outside on the grounds in the early spring sunshine, which, as far as the marauders were concerned, was a win.

Additionally, Sirius could barely contain his glee when they all returned to their common rooms that evening to find a notice pinned to the corkboard reminding students that dogs were not on the approved list for pets at Hogwarts. This caused a huge amount of confusion among the rest of the student populace of course,

“I’ve never seen a dog! Who’s got a dog?”

“If one of the Slytherins got a dog in, then I want to bring my rabbit from home!”

“I think I have seen one in the grounds, actually – maybe it’s a stray?”

Needless to say, Sirius and James were in their element.

“I’ll sniff him out!” Sirius announced,

“I bet he’s right under our noses!” James laughed.

“Could be closer than we think!”

Remus laughed too, trying to mask his unease. Sirius had so far said nothing about the half an hour in that broom cupboard. Remus could only assume that either:

a) Sirius had not found anything out of the ordinary, and in fact Remus was once again overthinking things (likely), or;

b) Sirius now knew everything about Remus, his darkest desires and deepest secrets – and preferred not to address it because the whole thing was just too embarrassing (less likely, but more frightening).

At any rate, Remus threw himself into his schoolwork, his prefect duties and generally being a model student. This at least ensured that he was out of Sirius’s way – Sirius had evidently decided to do the complete opposite.

He had never exactly been the best at following rules, of course. But even James admitted that this year Sirius appeared to be attempting some kind of record. He was in detention almost every night, rarely completed his homework (even though he could do it with one arm tied behind his back, if he wanted to) and split the rest of his time between making mischief and seeing how far he could get his tongue down Mary MacDonald’s throat. Not that Mary seemed to mind, much.

That was fine. That was just as it should be.

It wasn’t easy, though. As much of a relief it was to be away from the one person that he couldn’t

be sensible around – Remus also found it very distressing to be away from the one person he couldn't be sensible around. Marlene and Lily were lovely – they were kind and funny and clever and generous. But they were a poor substitute for the marauders.

He even tried spending a bit more time talking to Christopher – asking him questions about home, or the music he liked. It was worse than he'd expected. Christopher was a pureblood wizard, who didn't know any muggle music, and didn't appear to be that interested in hearing any. On top of that, he had realised his error in spoiling Remus's birthday surprise, and wouldn't stop apologising, which was incredibly annoying.

Remus had already promised James that he would act surprised when the party was unveiled in his honour. He'd tried to talk them all out of it, of course – but he'd been pleading for moderation since first year, and knew he wasn't likely to get it.

"Don't make a fuss on my account!" He said, at dinner the morning before, "Lily will go mental..."

"Wrong," James said, smugly, "Lily sent out half the invitations!"

"Invitations?!"

"Yeah, we've had a lot of interest. Considered charging entry, actually." Sirius explained, eyes twinkling across the table.

Remus looked at his food, quickly. He had decided not to make eye contact with Sirius ever again. It would not be easy, but it was the only way; of this he was convinced.

"Your little library gang wanted to come," James continued, "And they're not all Gryffindors, so we had to open it up to other houses... then there's this weird group of seventh years who said you're a 'total legend' - no idea what that's about, have you got a secret double life or something, Moony?"

Remus shrugged. He still had some students asking for cigarettes, though he didn't sell them anymore. He usually didn't mind lending fags though, as long as they were eventually repaid.

"Well, anyway," James pushed his glasses up his nose, "You simply have too many fans, Moony, and we can't let them all down at short notice, can we?"

"Fine. No drinking, though." Remus sighed. "It's a school night."

* * *

Wednesday 10th March 1976

It rained, the morning of Remus's birthday, but he couldn't have cared less. He woke up to a pile of presents from the Potters – all sorts of lovely things like sweets and a home baked birthday cake, plus a fine leather bound notebook and matching quill. There were cards from everybody – including one from Professor Ferox, which made Remus blush from top to bottom.

At breakfast, the marauders conducted almost the entire school in a rendition of 'happy birthday' which ended up running to five encores before Remus attempted to crawl under the table to escape it. The Slytherins scowled, stony faced, and in a fit of birthday *joie de vivre* Remus actually stuck his tongue out at Snape.

The marauders then piled his plate high with a slice of toast for each available topping, and handed

over their own gifts. Sirius and James were in their quidditch robes ready for an early morning practice before lessons.

“Do we *have* to, Potter?” Marlene whined, looking up at the enchanted ceiling which was grey and drizzly.

“Yes, if we want that cup.” James asserted, pouring her another mug of coffee. “And again, after last bell, before the... you-know-what.” He winked at Marlene so elaborately that Remus almost burst out laughing.

“Smooth, Potter.” Marlene raised an eyebrow.

“Right, I’ve got to get to the library,” Mary said brightly, climbing up off of Sirius’s lap, “Got to hand that Divination book back before Pince calls to have me hung, drawn and quartered.”

“See you after second quidditch?” Sirius asked, still holding Mary at the hips.

“Nah,” she shook her head, ringlets bouncing, “I’m *really* behind on History, thought I’d drop in on one of Remus’s classes.”

“*Study sessions.*” Remus corrected, quickly, careful not to look at the couple for too long.

“Whatever you say, Professor Lupin,” she grinned at him cheekily.

“Oi,” Sirius tugged at her to reclaim her attention, “I thought you were going to sit in the quidditch stands and do your homework?”

“Well, I said I might,” Mary squirmed free, “But it’s bloomin’ freezing out today, and Remus is really good at explaining--”

“Fine.” Sirius said, angrily, tossing his hair and crossing his arms. “Do whatever you like, I don’t care.”

“Oi, don’t start with me, Mr Black.” Mary frowned, “You’ll lose, I promise.”

Sirius did not look up. Mary put a hand on her hip, “Kiss me goodbye, then?”

Sirius didn’t move. Mary’s face darkened. “Fine.” She snapped, with a little stamp of her foot. “I’ll see you when I bloody well see you.” And marched off.

Everyone else at the table glanced around awkwardly, and now Remus was not the only one avoiding Sirius’s eye. Fortunately, Sirius was, for once, in tune with the feelings of others, and stood up.

“See you on the pitch.” He muttered to James as he stalked out of the room, red robes swishing behind him.

“Well.” Marlene said, “Can’t wait to hear about that for the next two weeks. Hope they make up soon.”

Everyone at the table agreed.

* * *

“The thing is,” Mary said to Remus later on that evening, as she painted her fingernails a dark, wicked shade of red, “Sirius and I just both have such fiery personalities, y’know? In *Witch Weekly*,

it says that means our relationship is very passionate.”

“Mm.” Remus replied, trying to tune it out as he very purposefully began drawing out lines for his Astronomy chart.

“And obviously, passion is really good, in a relationship,” she continued, blowing on her fingernails. “I mean... it’s really good, that side of things.” She smiled to herself, in that awful, smug, satisfied, *happy* way she always did when talking about Sirius. “But he needs to learn that I have my *own* life, you know? I mean, it’s the seventies!”

“Yeah, great.” Remus nodded, not looking up.

“Remus?” Christopher appeared at his side, “Are you doing a star chart? Can I watch?”

“I’m really not that great at Astronomy, Chris,” Remus replied, trying to concentrate on his lines, “You’re better off just reading the text book—”

“Oh no, I bet you’re *great*!”

“I’m really n—”

“Remus?” Mary said, leaning over the desk, jogging his ruler, and smearing the tiniest fleck of red nail polish onto his parchment, “Are you listening to me? I asked if you know *why* Sirius—”

“Lupin, Lupin!” A third year came running out of the portrait hole, “I lost your notes on unicorns, I’m really sorry, but—”

“Hiya Lupin, can I bum a fag?” A sixth year appeared.

Remus screwed up his face. A dull pain had started up behind his eyes.

“Just – can everybody please be quiet?!” He said, much more brusquely than he meant to. He looked up and saw everyone staring at him, slightly wide eyed. “Er... I’ve got a headache, I’m going for a lie down.” He got up.

“Oooh!” Mary said, standing up too, “You can’t! Sorry, Remus, but the lads are up there planning... er... I mean making... er... I mean...” She bit her lip. “I was supposed to keep you down here...”

Remus took a deep breath.

“Ok. I’ll go to the hospital wing, then.”

He refused all offers to escort him, hurrying as quickly as possible, skull throbbing sickly with every step. It was no good, he would have to start being rude to people - for the sake of his own sanity, if nothing else. Since when had he become everyone’s best friend, anyway? Wasn’t he just the same scrawny, mean, care home brat he’d always been?

The cool quiet of the sick bay was so soothing Remus could have burst into tears. As much as he usually felt very much at home in the warm red glow of the Gryffindor common room, it was in the still, soft greys of the hospital wing where Remus first remembered feeling truly peaceful at Hogwarts. He stood there enjoying it for a moment, eyes closed. If he could just stay here all night.

“Hello, Remus dear,” Madam Pomfrey smiled, coming out of her office, “Everything all right?”

“I er...”

Oh no. He really was going to cry. He swallowed helplessly, and raised a fist to his forehead.

“Remus?” The nurse came over a little quicker, her brow creasing with concern. She was still just a bit taller than him, but they were eye to eye, pretty much.

“Sorry,” he gasped, his voice tight and strange as he fought back tears, “I’ve... I’ve got a headache.”

“Sit down,” Madam Pomfrey said gently, motioning to the nearest armchair, by an unoccupied bed. “I’ve just the thing.”

She summoned a little pewter vial from her office. It flew into her palm and she uncorked it and gave it to him. “Have two good glugs of that – don’t worry, it’s nice and sweet.” Her eye twinkled a little.

Remus downed the potion, and felt all of the tension and pain leave his neck and head at once, like water washing away.

“Thanks,” he ducked his head, his voice was still thick. “Sorry. Bit of an overreaction.”

“Dear Remus,” Madam Pomfrey clucked, “I’ve known you for five years now, and not once have you ever overreacted. Are you sure you’re all right?”

“Yeah, better now, thanks.”

“I mean... in general?” She pressed, “I’ve heard you’ve been burning the candle at both ends – doing long hours in the library – and you have your prefect duties, and your... well, your health.”

“I’m fine,” Remus rubbed his eyes fiercely. “Honestly. Just... maybe just tired. I’ll go to bed now.”

“Happy birthday, Remus,” the medi-witch said, as he got up to leave.

“Cheers.” He nodded, politely. But then she did something very strange. She reached out and hugged him. Very tightly, and not for very long. It was lovely.

“Take care of yourself.” She said, as he left.

He walked back slowly, and wished he had an invisibility cloak for it. He could do without Severus following him, or having to break up a hexing match between two very inept first years. When he finally reached the portrait hole up to Gryffindor Tower, he really did fancy an early night. But of course, the marauders had other plans.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY REMUS!” The entire common room exploded, as soon as he appeared.

They’d done an incredible job. There were streamers hanging from every rafter, portrait and picture rail – and confetti liberally sprinkled over everything else. Students and friends of Remus’s from every house and year group grinned back at him, a flock of real live fairies fluttering over their heads. The tables were laden with sandwiches, cakes, pasties and pastries, as well as a huge bowl of very suspicious looking punch.

He smiled as widely as he could as he entered the room,

“Oh my god!” He said, hoping he was doing a good ‘surprised’ face, “You lot are crazy!”

They laughed, and eagerly ushered him into the room, where he found himself surrounded by cheers and pats on the back and birthday wishes. The record player began to blare, and Remus’s

sixteenth birthday party began in earnest.

“I think this is bigger than Sirius’s party,” James said, handing Remus a cup of the purplish looking punch, “Don’t tell him I said that, though.”

“I don’t know why all these people are here...” Remus replied, staring around amazed. Everyone from every one of his classes; his study group – some people he’d only spoken to a few times before.

“Because you’re *Moony*, obviously. The acceptable face of the marauders.” James nudged him. “Wow, look at Evans...”

Lily did look lovely, in a deep maroon mini skirt and high wedge sandals. She was dancing with Marlene and Mary in a little group of three, laughing and raising her hands above her head.

“Please tell me someone’s confiscated your broom tonight.” Remus said to James, who laughed good naturedly.

“Don’t worry, I’m not planning to get *that* drunk again any time soon. I’m going to try playing hard to get tonight.”

“She’ll appreciate that.” Remus replied.

He scanned the room for Sirius, who seemed to be missing. There was Peter, cosied up in an armchair with Desdemona. There was Christopher, having a very earnest conversation with a third year Ravenclaw girl, occasionally glancing up to smile at Remus. The rest of the Gryffindor quidditch team were huddled around the punch, challenging each other to down stronger and stronger measures. No Sirius.

James must have seen him looking.

“He’s moping somewhere, over Mary.” He explained, “I told him if he can’t cheer the fuck up then he’s not to come down here bringing everyone else down. I’ve taken him a few drinks up, but it’s not working.”

“Oh right. Still haven’t made up, then?” Remus watched Mary, still dancing, who had caught the eye of almost every boy in the room.

“Doesn’t look like it. I thought maybe tough love would help, but I’m not as good at it as you. So he’s sulking. Don’t mind him though, Moony, enjoy your party!”

He did try to. The cake Mrs Potter had sent was glorious – heavy, rich chocolate with white icing and multi-coloured hundreds and thousands. The candles were enchanted to burn all evening without dripping wax, and only went out for a few moments after Remus blew on them. He did *not* dance, though Marlene and Lily tried to drag him up a few times, but he did mingle, thanking people for coming, and having quite a nice chat with the seventh years about which NEWTs to take.

“You should be a teacher.” One of them said, which Remus thought was very kind, but completely insane.

It must have been getting close to midnight when he patted his back pocket for his pack of cigarettes, and found them missing. Sighing, he considered leaving it – but he had had enough to drink now, and just really wanted a smoke more than anything. There was still a box in the bottom of his trunk, if Sirius hadn’t pinched them. He decided to go and look.

Halfway up the stairs, he bumped into James again.

“Sorry, Moony,” the black-haired boy said, looking a bit drunk and a bit annoyed. “He’s coming down, now.”

Remus looked over James’s shoulder to see a sullen faced Sirius following him down the stairs.

“Not going to bed, are you?” James asked.

“No,” Remus shook his head, almost struck dumb, “Fags.”

“Filthy habit.” James said with a wonky smirk. He glanced over his shoulder, “C’mon then, Black.”

“Just a sec,” Sirius said, looking at Remus, “I just want to say happy birthday to Moony.”

“Fine, but hurry up.” James said, slurring, “Remus, tell him to swallow his stupid bloody pride and get down there and snog Mary, eh?”

“Ok, Prongs.”

James pushed the door open, and for a few seconds light and noise invaded the staircase, before muting again as he closed the door behind him. Sirius and Remus were alone.

“Happy birthday, Moony.” Sirius said, coming down a few steps to stand level with Remus.

“Cheers,” Remus smiled, as casually as he could. “You er... you ok?”

“Yeah, fine.” Sirius said, though it was clearly a lie. He was fiddling with an empty cup. “Sorry if I ruined your party.”

“You didn’t. It’s been great.”

“Good.”

Quiet. Sirius looked down, then up at Remus again. “James reckons I need to be the one to go and make up with Mary.”

“Probably a good idea.”

“You think so?”

“Well... yeah?” Remus was confused. “You... um. You like Mary, I thought.”

Sirius shrugged, looking at Remus again, his eyes dark blue, flecked with sharp, icy silver. His lips were shiny and red from drinking, and he had that slightly petulant look he got when he wasn’t smiling. Remus almost wanted to look away, he was so gorgeous. It couldn’t be right, staring at each other like that. It couldn’t possibly end well.

“I do like Mary.” Sirius said, leaning forward slightly. Remus could feel his breath on his skin.

“So go and snog her then, silly prat.” Remus said, hurriedly, trying to step back but bumping against the wall behind him. It really was such a stupidly narrow stairway - like the broom cupboard all over again.

“I will,” Sirius said, biting his lip slightly. *Oh god*, Remus thought. “I will, in a minute.”

Remus swallowed.

“Have you ever kissed anyone, Remus?”

“No, you know I haven’t.” The lie came easily now.

Sirius nodded, looking at him again, that forward, knowing look.

“It’s really not as scary as you think it is.” Sirius said.

Remus couldn’t bear it.

He might never know what came over him in that moment. It was all just *too much* and he grabbed the back of the other boy’s neck and pulled him forward, pressing his lips hard against Sirius’s. It was terrifying – and amazing. Even more so when Sirius began kissing him back, opening his lips and allowing Remus to slide his tongue inside. It was all at once startling, incredible, and familiar. He couldn’t think – as if every transmitter in his brain had short circuited at once, fizzing and popping; sending off sparks. *Yes*, was the only coherent thought he had; *yes yes yes yes*.

They came to their senses simultaneously, both pulling away. Remus snatched back his hand, Sirius stared at him wide-eyed. Remus looked away first.

“I’d better—” Sirius started back towards the common room,

“—Yeah, I was just...” Remus backed away, up the stairs.

Sirius disappeared back towards the party and Remus exhaled deeply, feeling he might sink to the floor. He ran his fingers through his hair and wiped his mouth. He rubbed his eyes and fought the urge to punch the wall. What had he been playing at?! Sirius would think he was completely mad – or worse. He’d never done anything like that before. Maybe he was mad.

He had to say sorry. He had to make it right, before Sirius told James – before they all *knew*.

Remus straightened his shirt and headed down the stairs, hoping to catch up with Sirius to apologise – to somehow explain. He re-entered the common room, still vibrant with light and music, and saw something that made him stop still. He shrank back, unable to look away.

Sirius was snogging Mary.

He had her pushed up against the marble mantelpiece, and she looked like she was pushing back against him with equal ferocity, their bodies pressed together, heads bobbing. Her arms were slung around his neck, her thin dark fingers curling in his hair. Everyone cheered and hooted merrily.

Remus turned on his heel and marched straight back to the tower. He ignored James and Peter, who were planning to head to the kitchens for more supplies. He just shook his head, mute, and carried on up the stairs to their bedroom. He drew the curtains around his bed closed and lay down, feeling strange.

He covered his face with his arms and thought about the two of them together. He thought about Sirius’ eyes and the curve of Mary’s hips until he fell into a fitful sleep.

'Hundreds and Thousands' are what we call cake sprinkles in the UK

Fifth Year: Morning After

Chapter Summary

CW for drug use (weed)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Thursday 11th March 1976

- Hello, Grant.
- *Wotcher, Remus.*
- How are you?
- *How am I? How are you, you silly twat; you're the one having a made up conversation with me.*
- Yeah, sorry about that.
- *S'ok, I'm not busy. I'm not even real.*
- You are real, I just can't talk to you in real life. I don't know where you are, even.
- *Nuffin' I can do about that. What's up?*
- I kissed Sirius.
- *Bloody hell.*
- What should I do?
- *How should I know? Didn't I tell you not to?*
- Yeah, but. He kissed me back. For a minute, at least.
- *Sure you're not just imagining that?*
- Yeah...

Remus gave up at that point. He had been lying awake in bed since at least five o'clock in the morning, alternately panicking and soaring with joy. He had to be mad. Mental. Crazy. Bonkers. Lost it. He'd thought that talking to someone else might help - but who could you talk to that early in the morning? Especially when it concerned a secret which could very well get you expelled, for all Remus knew.

Unable to find a solution by talking to an imaginary person (or at least an imagined version of a real person), he returned to his previous, somewhat less constructive diversion – trying to relive the three minutes on the staircase with Sirius last night *without* reliving the part where they both ran away from each other.

Did he regret it? It was too soon to tell. On the one hand, Remus might well have just ruined the best friendship he had ever had – or ever would have. On the other hand, it had been a bloody good snog.

In Remus's limited experience, he thought it probably made sense that just because you really madly fancied someone, it didn't mean that when you finally kissed them it would be as good as you'd imagined. And Remus knew he had a very vivid imagination sometimes – but Sirius was *Sirius*. It had been anything but disappointing. It had been perfect, in fact.

As long as you pretended that last part hadn't happened.

Stifling a groan, he scolded himself and tried to think rationally. *Approach it like an essay, he thought. Lay out all the facts, then make your argument.*

So, the facts:

- a. Remus Lupin had kissed Sirius Black full on the lips.
- b. Sirius Black had not immediately thrown a punch.
- c. Sirius Black had actually kissed Remus Lupin back (despite what the imaginary Grant had to say)
- d. Sirius Black had also kissed Mary MacDonald, immediately afterwards, and with considerable vigour.
- e. Sirius Black had not come to bed. At all.

Bollocks. Shitting buggering bollocks.

Remus climbed out of bed, it was no good lying there tossing and turning. He had to get out of the tower. Sirius's bed lay empty to his left. If he wasn't in it, then he was most likely in the common room. To be safe, Remus took James's cloak.

He was good at being quiet and moving without a sound, but he needn't have worried. Sirius was dead to the world – he lay on the couch, head flung back, the perfect line of his jaw exposed. Mary was curled up against his chest, a patchwork quilt thrown over the two of them. Remus hurried past, wanting to get as far away as possible.

The prefect's bathroom was probably one of the weirdest parts of the castle. Remus had thought the older students were teasing him, when they gave out the password in the train back in September. He went once, and once only, in the first term, but couldn't get past the thought of actually removing all of his clothes in such a big open room. What if someone came in?

However, on this particular morning it was the only place he was sure he would not be found – even if the marauders decided to use the map; they couldn't come and find him without the password.

He reached the fourth floor and whispered, "squeaky clean" at the entrance before slipping in. No one was in there; it was much too early. He had often wondered whether there was some kind of mechanism in place to stop anyone else from getting in while you were in the bath – he had so far seen no evidence of this and decided to play it safe.

Stripping down to his boxers and vest, Remus ran the water, and pumped a lot of bubbles into the Olympic swimming pool sized bathtub before sliding in, still in his underthings. The bathroom was one of the most beautiful rooms in the castle, Remus acknowledged. Everything was clean white marble and glimmering golden taps. The stained-glass windows depicted a series of gorgeous, shimmering sea creatures. A lovely tangerine smell was rising from the great white drifts of foam, and Remus finally began to relax.

He had never learnt how to swim – the St Edmund's boys were offered lessons down at the local swimming baths for free, but Matron wouldn't let him go. He hadn't minded – he didn't want the other boys to see his scars. But now he was older, he thought he'd like to learn. Sirius had once talked about family holidays in the south of France, where the sea was warm enough to bathe in. Remus couldn't imagine that. The only sea he'd ever seen was at Southend – and once Margate. It was bloody freezing, a dirty grey-green colour. Not the crystal azure Sirius had described.

Still, Remus could float. He lay on his back and stared up at the chambered ceiling.

- *Having fun?*
- Not really.
- *So, if he kissed you back, and then ran off and kissed Mary, where does that leave things?*
- I don't know, do I?! That's what you're supposed to help me figure out!
- *Alright, alright, calm your tits.*
- You don't say that. Sirius says that.
- *Look, I'm doing my best. I told you, I'm not even real.*
- Maybe I was a really bad kisser.
- *Maybe.*
- The real Grant is a lot nicer than you, you know.
- *Yeah, well whose fault is that? You're the one talking to yourself, you nutter. Find someone real to talk to.*

Remus sighed, frowning. Could you be a bad kisser and not know it? Probably. He didn't have enough experience to know. It hadn't felt bad – it had felt like they fit.

He kissed me back.

Remus knew, deep down, that it had nothing to do with how he'd done it. It was the very fact that he'd done it at all.

He knew it – but he wasn't ready to address it yet. Not even with an imaginary person. If he was being thoroughly truthful, Remus knew that Sirius had every right to run away – to be shocked, confused or even frightened. And there was a mad kind of Sirius Black logic behind snogging the very first honest-to-goodness girl he could find, right after something like that.

Once again, Remus was confronted with the image of Sirius pressing Mary up against the mantelpiece, those hands on her waist that had been on his waist, only moments before... and he kicked, involuntarily, forgetting to stay afloat.

Spluttering and choking as he went under, Remus scrabbled back to the surface and came up coughing, orange hued foam going everywhere.

"Remus, is that you?!" A girl's voice echoed across the bathroom floor.

He struggled to wipe his hair out of his face, blinking, and just made out the blurry outline of Lily Evans in a pink quilted dressing gown. He rubbed his eyes, hard, his feet finding the floor, and choked out,

"Hiya, Lily."

"Christ, are you ok? Thought I'd have to dive in and save you there!"

"Lost my balance."

"I can't believe you beat me to a bath, I thought I'd be the first up. Got a filthy headache." Lily rubbed her forehead with a pained expression.

"Yeah, that punch was pretty strong," Remus replied, though he felt fine. "I was just getting out... er... do you mind turning around?"

"Oh, ok, sorry!" Lily smiled, turning her back.

Remus moved to the side and pulled himself up out of the warm water with some reluctance. He felt silly and girlish, asking her not to look – James or Sirius probably wouldn't care at all. Grabbing a towel, he wrapped it around himself, over his shoulders, rather than around his waist. That wasn't exactly manly, either, but he didn't need Evans asking about his scars on top of everything else.

“Ok.” He said, hurrying into a changing cubicle.

He heard Lily running the taps again, and a sweet lavender smell filled the room as he dried off and changed into his uniform.

“So where did you disappear to last night?” Lily called, over the noise of running water, “We must have gone on ‘til at least two. Potter was so pissed.”

“Must have got a bit too drunk,” Remus called back, “Went to bed at midnight.”

“Lightweight!” Lily teased. He heard the taps go off, and a soft splash as she got in the bath. “Still,” she carried on, “At least Sirius and Mary made up, eh?”

“Yeah, that was lucky.” He replied, evenly, exiting his stall.

Lily was bobbing about at the far end of the pool, her red hair piled up on top of her head, surrounded by a sea of purple foam. She smiled at him.

“Library.” He said, feeling awkward and clammy, fully dressed in the warm, steamy bathroom.

“Of course,” she laughed, “Where else? Oh, did you see that notice in the common room?”

“No,” he shook his head. He had not looked at anything but Sirius in the common room.

“Career meetings with McGonagall have been posted – mid-April.”

“Oh good,” Remus felt his limbs grow heavy, “Thanks.”

It was a relief to be out of the hot bathroom, and rather than the library, Remus decided to go outside for a bit. To the greenhouses and back, maybe. There were sometimes a few Hufflepuffs hanging around there dealing pot, and even though it was a school day, and he hadn't even had breakfast yet, this seemed like a very good idea.

- This is all your fault, you know.
- *How's that?*
- If you hadn't snogged me last summer, I'd still be...
- *Oblivious? Confused?*
- Normal.
- *That's a bloody lie and you know it. Wanting to get your end away is the only normal thing about you.*
- Fair enough.
- *You're glad I snogged you. You bloody loved it.*
- ...Yeah.
- *You're only annoyed because Sirius didn't react the way you did.*
- ...Yeah...
- *The question is – why the bloody hell would you expect Sirius to act anything like you?*

Why indeed.

This was the first bit of useful advice imaginary Grant had dredged up, and Remus clung to it. Sirius needed to do whatever it was Sirius needed to do. It wasn't for Remus to decide. He congratulated himself on being very mature about this whole thing. After all, he thought, at least it's done now. At least you know what it's like. Could you survive forever, he wondered, on one kiss?

Fortunately, there were indeed three Hufflepuffs sitting on the grass behind the greenhouses, two girls and a boy. They smiled at him in that friendly, stupid way that told him they had started early, and in slow and gentle tones congratulated him on the excellent party. He sat with them until he couldn't ignore his hunger pangs any more, and staggered back to the castle dizzily for breakfast.

"Here he is!" James boomed, as Remus took his place at the table.

Peter, who had his head in his hands and looked a bit green around the gills groaned,

"Not so bloody *loud*, Prongs, I'm begging you."

"Oh, eat your eggs, you'll feel better." James grinned. Remus piled up his own plate with two fried eggs, two sausages, a pile of baked beans, three slices of toast, two slices of fried tomato and three rashers of bacon. He felt very calm and comfortable now. He could tell himself it had been the bath. But obviously not.

"I can't tell if you're hungover, or it's just that incredible metabolism of yours." Marlene grimaced at his plate.

"Bit of both." Remus shrugged, tucking in.

"And something else," James wagged his finger, "Been down at the greenhouses already, Moony? Is this how you want to enter your seventeenth year?"

"Yes." Remus said, mouth full.

Sirius was there, of course, but he hadn't said anything yet. He was propping his head up sleepily on one elbow, nursing a large mug of milky tea. Remus stared at him intently, willing him to look up, but he didn't. Mary was nowhere to be seen.

"McDonald's being a wimp," Marlene explained, "Pulling a sickie, even though everyone saw her down an entire bottle of Witches Brew by herself."

"She did?" Remus said, "Wow, impressive, she probably deserves a lie in then." He meant it sincerely.

"We're all feeling rough, though," Marlene said, "Evans was chucking up for at least an hour before bed."

"Is she ok?!" James asked, scandalised.

"Yeah, I saw her this morning in the prefect's bathroom." Remus said, swallowing his mouthful. "She's ok."

"In the bathroom, eh?" James raised an eyebrow. "You've got to stop your philandering ways, Remus, give the rest of us a chance."

"Oh yeah, that's me," Remus snorted, "The Casanova of Gryffindor Tower..."

He'd only said it to make James laugh, but Sirius's head finally snapped up, his eyes resting on Remus. There was a tiny, almost imperceptible frown, knitting his brow. He looked at Remus as if he was an incantation he hadn't yet worked out how to pronounce. Remus looked back, steadily, allowing this scrutiny – he would allow Sirius anything. Another moment and it was over. Sirius looked away, saying nothing.

Chapter End Notes

Whenever anyone says 'pissed', I mean in the British sense (drunk), rather than 'angry' (for which I would say 'pissed off').

'getting your end away' - British colloquialism which refers to pretty much any kind of sexual gratification (usually male). (Also, I'm aware that this line equates feelings of sexual desire with being 'normal'. I just want to say that I am aware of this, and it's not my personal belief - there is no such thing as normal, and I mean no harm to anyone who does not experience sexual desire. It's just Remus's thought process.)

'Pulling a sickie' - pretty self explanatory, but basically faking being ill to get out of work/lessons.

Also, sorry about the formatting on the Grant conversations, the text box really really seems to hate bullet points. Also, I hope those bits don't feel like a cop out - I promise that the chapter length is same as usual (word count 2000-ish).

Fifth Year: Stale Mate

Chapter Summary

CW for drug use (weed).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*So messed up, I want you here
In my room, I want you here
Now we're gonna be face-to-face
And I'll lay right down in my favourite place*

*And now I want to be your dog
Now I want to be your dog
Now I want to be your dog
Well, come on...*

Tuesday 16th March 1976

By the time the next full moon arrived, it became clear that Remus and Sirius had reached a stalemate. Remus had tried being indirect – catching Sirius’s eye during meals, or the rare evenings they were all together. He tried hanging back in the dorm room to see if Sirius would stay behind too. But no luck. Sirius’s eyes never met his, and he was always the first to leave a room with Remus in it.

Short of actually ambushing Sirius somewhere (which he refused to do), Remus was running out of options. The plea for another phone call with Grant was returned, with a note in Matron’s neat, brutally clear handwriting on the envelope. ‘*Recipient no longer known at this address*’. He was completely alone.

Once, Remus thought he’d got close to catching Sirius. They were leaving Charms, and James had stopped back to talk to Professor Flitwick, and Peter had nipped to the loo, so Remus and Sirius found themselves waiting alone in a busy corridor. He seized the chance, saying quietly,

“Look, about the other night--”

“Yeah, we were all so pissed, right?!” Sirius laughed, loudly – loud enough for people to turn and look. “Mental. Can hardly remember half of it!”

“Er... yeah, right.” Remus withdrew.

It was a complete lie, they both knew that. But it was one of those awful cases where neither of them were supposed to *acknowledge* the lie; just keep stepping over it. You couldn’t push Sirius any further than he was willing to go. And he was clearly not willing to go... *there*.

Then, of course, there was Mary. If Sirius *did* want Remus in the same way Remus wanted Sirius, then surely the Mary thing would be over. But no, Remus was going to have to come to terms with the fact that it wasn’t ‘the Mary thing’; it was his best friend’s relationship, and it wasn’t going

anywhere any time soon. She was everywhere he was, and more often than not on his lap.

During this time, Remus briefly flirted with the idea of leglimency. Being able to read Sirius's mind was very appealing. He soon gave up, finding it much more difficult than anything else he'd ever attempted. Plus, with his revision schedule now in full swing, he had very little room in his head for new spells.

Now, on the night of the full moon, Remus sat alone in the Shrieking Shack, waiting for his friends to arrive and not sure if they would be two or three. He was getting a bit paranoid, actually, but that wasn't Sirius's fault. In an attempt at escapism, Remus had been spending more and more time down at the greenhouses, spacing out and filling up with dozy green smoke. Not ideal. Better than drinking, he supposed. Better than getting detentions for stupid pranks.

He'd smoked that particular day to calm his nerves around the moon – and to see if it had any effect on the transformation pains. Though goodness only knew what a stoned werewolf would be like.

A sharp pain seared his shoulder blades, and he gasped with surprise. Well, that was that experiment done with.

“Evening Moony,” the door opened and James poked his head around.

“It's starting,” Remus clenched his jaw, “Hurry up, get in.”

James quickly transformed, and was followed into the room by a large brown rat and a big black dog. Remus closed his eyes, relieved.

The night of the full moon was no different from any other they'd had so far. As animals, they were less conscious, or perhaps just less concerned by their more human problems. The wolf only wanted to run, and hunt, to roll about in the undergrowth and chase the black one and playfight the big one.

The next morning, he felt refreshed and invigorated – or at least he would have if it weren't for the bone crushing agony of returning to human form. Some things never changed. The marauders crept out, only twenty minutes or so before Madam Pomfrey appeared to take Remus back to school. In the hospital wing, she gave him his usual deep sleep potion and he did not open his eyes until well after midday. This was always going to be a problem, he had realised lately. No matter how much his monthly transformations had been improved, he still lost so much time.

He'd already checked, and found that the May full moon did not coincide with any exams. This seemed very odd to him, until he realised that it must have been orchestrated this way, by Dumbledore or McGonagall. He found that a bit embarrassing. Didn't they know he had sat through classes before with his blood boiling and his muscles aching? That he had finished essays after being up for two days, head throbbing and so tired he only had adrenaline left for fuel? And he had still beaten half the class. He could *do* it. They just had to let him. How would he ever get a job after school if he couldn't be seen to be keeping up?

When Remus opened his eyes at about four o'clock, he was very surprised to see Sirius there. alone.

“Morning,” he smiled, softly, a trace of anxiety still clinging to his features. That might not be because of Remus – Sirius was often anxious, these days. If Snape was Remus's malevolent shadow, then Regulus was Sirius's. It seemed even if you left the Black family in everything but name, you were never really free of the sense of obligation. Or the guilt. That could be the case

with all families, Remus reflected. He wouldn't know.

"Morning," he nodded back, pulling himself up. "Good night, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, great," Sirius nodded, eager for some familiar territory. "Can't believe we found that waterfall, Prongs reckons there's a cave behind it. Told him if there is, then a troll probably lives there. They like caves, don't they?"

"They do, yeah."

It wasn't awkward, exactly. They chatted like this all the time. But they didn't usually struggle to keep a conversation going. Quite the opposite, in fact. Sirius was looking at the ceiling, when out of the blue he said,

"We're ok, aren't we, Moony?" His voice was small.

"Of course," Remus said, hurriedly.

"Because you - You, James, Pete. You're my best mates."

"Yeah. You're my best mate. You all are."

"Ok good." Sirius look relieved, and Remus was glad he'd said the right thing. But his face seemed to grow troubled again. "There's... there's Mary, just now, too."

"Mary." Remus repeated.

"Yeah, I said I'd go and meet her. Pete'll be along in a bit."

"No, its fine. Once Madam Pomfrey's back she'll probably let me out. I'll... see you this evening?"

"Yeah, of course," Sirius grinned, looking more comfortable than he had in weeks. *We understand each other, now.* "See you at dinner, mate." He said this last word with an overly jocular blokeyness that was very unlike him. Remus was surprised he didn't punch him on the arm, or knuckle his hair.

* * *

Wednesday 14th April 1976

The next month passed in a blur of quills, books and parchment. Remus couldn't be sure whether or not he and Sirius were still at odds, because he simply didn't have the time to worry about it. When they did see each other - in lessons, in the corridors, or yawning goodnight to each other before bed - everything seemed perfectly fine.

Remus's study group had doubled in size, until he had to break them up by different subjects for each day of the week. The sessions mostly took the form of running through past written papers from previous years, sharing their answers, pointing out key extracts from their various textbooks. Remus felt that he was learning just as much as he was teaching - and he was really enjoying it.

"How come you're not in Ravenclaw?" Christopher asked, one day, as he helped Remus tidy up the disused classroom where they'd been practicing levitation. It was a mess.

"My dad was, actually," Remus smiled softly. That didn't hurt as much as it used to. There were other things, more important. "And the hat did mention it at my sorting, but... not to be."

“Seems like you would have been better off there.” Christopher said, repairing a shattered inkwell and cleaning up the black puddle beneath.

“Maybe,” Remus shrugged, “If you’d known me then you wouldn’t think so.”

They finished this job and Remus glanced at the clock. “Shit, I have to go... sorry, Chris, will you be ok getting back to the Tower?”

“Pureblood privilege,” Christopher said, making a face, “I don’t get bothered. Where’re you going?”

“Er... it’s private. Sorry. Thanks for the help!”

He had to run, in the end, to get to the hospital wing in time. Madam Pomfrey scolded him lightly,

“No physical exercise on full moons!” She said, fastening her cloak, “You’ll get yourself agitated, and we’ve had such a good year.”

“I’ll be fine,” he waved a hand, a little too casually. Maybe he ought to get Prongs to scratch him up a bit, so that she didn’t get suspicious. No way would Prongs do it, though.

They began to walk out into the grounds together, a journey so familiar now they could do it in their sleep. “I could do this bit on my own, now,” he said, conversationally, “I know how it all works well enough. You’d only need to get me in the mornings, then.”

“Sorry, dear,” she shook her head, “Dumbledore’s orders. I’m to make sure you’re safely off the grounds on time.”

“Oh. Of course.” He tried not to sound ungrateful. Of course, that was a concern – that he might forget, or run late. Then what? It would be much worse than this, he thought, once he turned seventeen and had to register with the ministry.

Inside the Shack, Madam Pomfrey shrieked,

“What’s wrong?!” Remus withdrew his wand.

“Oh, nothing,” she clutched her chest, “I... I saw a rat. Horrible things. Sorry, dear, I wish we could find a nicer place for you...”

“Oh, it’s fine... see you in the morning.”

When the door close, he spun around, “Pete? Was that you?”

“... Sorry, Moony,” Peter’s voice came from upstairs. “I was supposed to be keeping guard...”

He came down the staircase, followed by Sirius and James, who were yawning, and looked as though they’d just woken up.

“What are you two doing here?!” Remus asked, surprised, “What about the match?!”

“We’ve been sleeping since the final bell,” James explained, “Then we’ll get another hour or two’s kip in the morning... and lunchtime, if we can swing it.”

“You’re mental.” Remus shook his head, “Both of you.” He looked at Sirius, to check if they were still playing the eye contact game.

“Anything for our Moony.” Sirius said, holding his gaze for a good few seconds before dropping it, looking away and rubbing his arm. This satisfied Remus, though he knew he ought to feel guilty. He didn’t know why he took so much pleasure in watching Sirius squirm.

“We’re early,” Peter said, sitting on Remus’s little cot, “Aren’t we, Remus?”

“Yeah, I think so,” he stretched a little bit, to get a feel for his various aches and twinges, “Yeah, I’m a way off.”

“Oh, good, can I go back to sleep?” Sirius yawned. He and James had settled themselves on the floor, and Sirius was resting his head on James’s shoulder. *Fuck you, James*, Remus thought, before stopping himself. He leaned against the wall, self-consciously.

“Oi, when’s your appointment with McGonagall?” James asked, shrugging his shoulder to shake Sirius off.

“Err... First thing next Friday I think. Why?”

“What are you going to say?”

“Say?”

“About careers, idiot.”

“Oh, right,” Sirius stifled another yawn, his eyes watering with tiredness. “Ugh, I dunno. Don’t really fancy the idea of a job, much. Father wanted me to go into politics, so I s’pose... not that.”

“My mum says it’s a bad time to join the ministry,” Peter said, thoughtfully. “But Dezzie reckons it’s the best time - when the war’s over we’ll be in on the ground floor to rebuild.”

“Well that’s one way of looking at it.” Sirius raised an eyebrow. He nudged James, “Go on then, tell us what your plans are.”

“Hm?” James looked at him, innocently.

“Oh, come *on* Potter, don’t tell me you haven’t got it all laid out in front of you. Puddlemere? Holyhead? The Cannons? Who’s shown the most interest so far?”

“Actually,” James raised his head in a very dignified way, “If you must know, they’ve *all* inquired, according to McGonagall. But I’m turning them down – for now, anyway.”

“Oh yeah? Going to have a gap year and live off your Sleek-ezy millions?”

“No, you git. I’m going to fight.”

There was a weird sort of pause. Sirius looked deeply troubled. Remus broke it.

“You what, mate?”

“Well,” James looked uncharacteristically nervous about this, “The war won’t end unless people fight it. Mum and dad are working so hard and... well I couldn’t be any kind of son, if I didn’t help, would I? Dumbledore needs as many people as he can get. Plus,” he laughed, shakily, “If Wormy wants a job at the ministry, we’d better make sure the ministry is still standing, right?”

“So... when you speak to McGonagall, you’ll say...”

“That quidditch can wait? That I want to do everything I can to make sure the wizarding world is safe for everyone, not just purebloods? Yeah, pretty much.” James ended, simply, looking down at his hands.

Quiet again. Finally, Sirius muttered,

“Then that’s what I’ll say too.”

“Mate, you don’t have to...”

“What else am I going to do? Retire with my uncle’s inheritance and let you have all the fun? Piss off.”

“Me too!” Peter said suddenly, eager to be included, “I can help!”

“Course you can,” James beamed, “You’re a marauder, that’s basically the best qualification you can have.”

“What about you, Moony?” Peter gabbled, excited and bright eyed.

“I’m going to...mmph” *Too late, here it comes*, “Shit – change! Quick!”

They all leapt up ready to take their animal forms.

The last thing Remus saw clearly was his three friends, standing together, thinking about their futures.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'I wanna be your dog' by The Stooges.

Blokeyness - the state or quality of being 'blokey' :P

Fifth Year: The Week Before

Friday 23rd April 1976

“Good afternoon, Mr Lupin,” Professor McGonagall smiled as he entered her office.

“Good afternoon, Professor.” He replied politely, sitting on the chair opposite her desk.

“All ready for your exams?”

“Er... I think so.”

“I have every faith in you,” she smiled - McGonagall’s smile was given only when she felt the situation deserved it. For this reason, Remus smiled back.

The middle-aged witch looked down at a pile of parchment smoothed out before her. Notes from his other professors, perhaps. She cleared her throat, looked up, and smiled again, “You have received consistently strong results during your time at Hogwarts.”

“Not the whole time,” he murmured, thinking of those wasted months in first year.

“You are a prefect,” McGonagall continued, “A generally well-behaved, thoughtful young man. You seem to excel in your Charm work, and History, and I hear you have even gathered some pupils of your own?”

“I just don’t mind helping out,” he explained, embarrassed. “If people get stuck.”

“An admirable quality, Mr Lupin.”

“Er... thanks.”

“So,” she said, briskly, “With all of these good things in mind, have you given any thought to a career to pursue once you have completed your education?”

He was nervous, he realised. More nervous than he expected to be. He rubbed his damp palms on his trouser legs, and tried to make eye contact.

“I’ll have to register myself. With the ministry.”

He saw her purse her lips, but she didn’t interrupt.

“And... I mean I don’t know much about it, not as much as I ought to, maybe, but... the war...”

“What about the war, Lupin?” She snapped.

“Well... people - wizards - they don’t want someone like me, with my problems to have jobs at all, so I thought--”

“We cannot submit to others low expectations of us, Lupin. You have done great things, at Hogwarts, and I have no doubt you are capable of greater things still.”

“Maybe,” he shrugged, “But I won’t get the chance unless I... unless I get involved, I suppose.”

“Get involved.” Any trace of kindness or encouragement had left her face.

“Yeah.”

“Mr Lupin.” McGonagall’s brow furrowed. She looked tired, as though she’d been working on a difficult problem all day, “You know that I have already spoken with Mr Black, about his own plans.”

“Yeah.” Remus wasn’t sure what that had to do with anything.

“And I’m sure you can imagine exactly what Mr Black’s plans are.”

“Er... I could guess...”

He didn’t need to guess. they had all discussed it last night, all four of them on James’s bed.

James had always been the head of the group - the leader. His innate goodness, his confidence and his easy going demeanour had ensured this from their very first meeting on the Hogwarts Express. But now, to Remus, at least, he seemed to have taken on a new dimension of wise heroism in his decision to join Dumbledore and pit himself against Voldemort.

If James was doing it, then they were all pretty sure it was the right thing to do. Sirius had spoken at length, and with some emotion, about his own desire to beat ‘them’. Remus had the impression that Sirius didn’t see the war as political, so much as extremely personal. Voldemort might as well have been his mother, or his father. Peter was always excited to begin a new venture, and Remus had to admit that he was impressed - Wormtail was usually the first to point out the risks in a such a plan. But James made it all seem so easy; so simple.

As for Remus, there was never any question. He had no other options, as far as he could see it, and the least to lose out of all of them. The three boys he shared a room with had been his primary concern for the past five years, and he saw no reason for this to change when they left school. And he couldn’t deny, even to himself, that staying close to Dumbledore seemed the most likely route to Greyback.

He said none of this to McGonagall, of course.

The professor removed her spectacles, rubbed her eyes, and covered her face with her hands. She sighed, and the sound struck Remus in a painful way, in the pit of his stomach – he had disappointed her.

“Mr Lupin, I have interviews with Mr Potter and Mr Pettigrew later this afternoon. Am I to assume that I will hear the same things from them? Don’t any of you have any career ambitions beyond this dreadful war?”

Remus shrugged, looked at his feet. She wouldn’t change his mind.

“There’ll be time for that.” He mumbled, “Afterwards.”

She lowered her hands, replaced her glasses and looked at him. Her eyes were rimmed red, slightly puffy. She wasn’t giving him her famous ‘look’, trying to unnerve him into giving the right answer. The expression she wore was something different entirely - one that didn’t suit her at all. He didn’t like it.

“I didn’t become a teacher for this.” She said, very quietly, her voice strained.

He didn’t know what to say to that. He felt sorry - but he didn’t want to say so, in case she pounced on this as an avenue to dissuading him.

“I think Peter wants to do something at the ministry,” he offered, “afterwards.”

“Well, that’s a start, at least,” McGonagall smiled tightly, and reshuffled her papers. “Now, Mr Lupin, let’s talk about NEWTs, shall we?”

* * *

Thursday 14th May 1976

Shakily, Remus made his way to the very top of the quidditch stands. He found his friends, Lily, Mary, Peter and Desdemona, waiting excitedly as the crowd began to cheer. He sat next to Desdemona, who was wearing Peter’s red and gold scarf,

“Hi Dezzie,” Remus smiled and gave a little wave. “Er... are you cold?”

“I’m trying to blend in,” she giggled, “Petey thought they wouldn’t let a Ravenclaw sit here.”

“Oh...”

“Should you be here, Moony?” Peter asked, watching the players walk out onto the pitch with a pair of binoculars, “Feeling ok?”

“Oh no, have you been ill again, Remus?” Desdemona clucked sympathetically.

“Oh, er, Remus was just, er...” Peter stammered, realising his mistake,

“Out by the greenhouses.” Remus said, blandly. “I’m stoned out of my mind.”

He was stone cold sober, but Desdemona was an innocent sort of girl.

“Er... ok...” She smiled politely, but inched away from him, slightly.

He had slipped out while Madam Pomfrey was in her office. He felt bad about it, and would apologise later, but he had to see his friends play. They would do the same for him. It was Gryffindor vs. Hufflepuff today, and the crowd braying opposite was decked out in glorious sunshine yellow. It had rained in the night (Remus knew this because he had woken up with wet hair and feet) and the skies were a clear spring blue. Knowing that James would see this as a very good omen, Remus smiled to himself and cheered along with his friends.

It was a good game – a great one, for Sirius, who was in particularly good form. He never missed a bludger, and at one point made an impressive swing right in the nick of time to save the third Gryffindor chaser, leaning so far over that Remus was sure he would topple to the ground.

“There’s not going to be another party if we win, is there?” Lily said over the cheers as James scored his fifth goal, “I don’t think we can cope with another one this close to exams.”

“Not if James has anything to do with it,” Remus said, “He won’t want to throw away the hours he’s been putting in at the library.”

“Library?!”

“Yeah, he’s been there every day, almost,” Peter filled in, “Revising his bloody arse off. He’s even more of a swot than Moony these days.”

“I don’t believe you.” Lily raised an eyebrow.

“Believe it.” Remus laughed, “He’s even enforced dorm room rules so he can get enough sleep between exams. We have to be completely silent after eight o’clock.”

Another cheer went up – the sixth goal for James, twelfth overall for Gryffindor.

“Ha!” Peter roared, “They’ll never catch up now!”

Gryffindor won, of course – Remus wasn’t sure if James had yet lost a game. As soon as the final whistle had been blown, all of the Gryffindor students poured down onto the pitch to congratulate their team. Mary was at the head of this, having run down a few minutes ahead of everyone else. Remus, as ever, was behind.

He didn’t usually mind, but with the moon so close behind him, he was still pretty sore, and his limp more pronounced than usual. It was probably better if he waited for everyone else to get down, he thought, less people to notice him struggling. Madam Pomfrey had once or twice suggested a walking stick, for when his hip was very bad, but he wouldn’t hear of it.

Remus was almost all the way down the rickety wooden steps, and could see James and Sirius at the centre of a red robed mob on the quidditch pitch. James looked up and waved at him, and Sirius caught on, waving too. Remus grinned widely, hoping they could see it, and stuck a thumb up by way of congratulations.

As he did so, something very sharp and hot stung his ankle, just as he’d raised it to descend another step. With a yelp of surprise and pain, Remus tumbled forward, losing his balance completely and clattering down the rest of the stairs, landing in a heap at the bottom. *OW*, he thought.

“Fuck.” He said, pushing up with sore splintered hands, and trying to get to his knees, at least. The problem with being so lanky, he thought, was that there was more of you to get knocked.

Dazed and confused, he was grateful that most of the crowd had their backs turned to him – he must have fallen at least eight steps down. Then he heard it – the muffled giggling. He turned, pain shooting up his left side as he did so, and saw three faces hiding underneath the wooden scaffolding. It was Mulciber, Barty Crouch, and Snape.

“Oopsie daisy!” Crouch cackled, showing rows of sharp white teeth, a little too small for his mouth. “Poor ickle Lupin!” He was fiddling with something small and metal.

“Tossers.” Remus muttered, righting himself, hauling his body up as quickly as possible. He fumbled in his trouser pocket for his wand, praying it hadn’t been broken. No, it was fine. He withdrew it and pointed it between the gaps in the steps. His ankle was still throbbing, an itchy, biting pain. “What did you do?”

“Don’t blame us for your clumsiness, *Loony Lupin*.” Snape said coolly, stepping backwards into the shadows. “And get that wand out of my face, before I report you for drawing on unarmed students.”

“Unarmed my arse!” Remus growled, still aiming his wand, “*Expelliamus!*”

But nothing happened. They really were unarmed.

“What did I tell you, gentlemen?” Snape sneered at his cronies, “Loony Lupin is dangerously mad. Emphasis on the danger...”

Crouch was beside himself now, giggling manically as he tossed the little metal token between his hands, like some weird juggling act. Was it a sickle? No, Remus could smell it now, even as they

were backing away. It must be a prefect's pin. A silver one.

"Oi!" He yelled, suddenly, but they just laughed and kept walking.

By the time James and Sirius – who had seen Remus stumble, but not much else – reached him, the three Slytherins were gone.

"Bloody hell, you ok Moony?" James asked, helping him straighten up, offering an arm.

"Fine, yeah... must have tripped. Stupid long legs, eh?" Remus tried to smile. Sirius was there, and he refused to mention any kind of Slytherin attack with Sirius around. He was too unstable; too reckless these days. The hot, angry itch in his ankle was driving him mad.

He hoped murtlap essence helped that too. Bloody Snape. What had he done that for? None of the three who'd attacked him were prefects, so where did they get the badge? And more specifically, *why the bloody badge?!*

The girls had arrived at the scene now, and were making a fuss, telling Remus to sit down and take deep breaths, asking whether this or that hurt. It was no good saying that *nothing* hurt, after he'd just fallen head first down a flight of stairs, and it was no good saying that *everything* hurt, but that he'd had much worse. And all the while his mind kept going back to the sting in his ankle, and the word Severus had used – *dangerous*. What did he know? Or what did he think he knew?

"Remus, you really are awfully pale," Lily was saying.

Marlene placed a hand on his forehead, and he batted her away irritated,

"I'm fine." He said.

"Alright, give him some air, for Merlin's sake!" Sirius, who had up until now said nothing at all, suddenly burst out, pushing them all out of the way.

Remus looked up, squinting through a few locks of stray hair, to see Sirius with his determined face on. He put his hands on his hips, in a very good imitation of James delegating jobs for a prank, "You lot go to the changing rooms, or the great hall or wherever you're supposed to be. Moony, c'mon, let's go back to the castle, we'll go by the hospital wing. Prongs, you'll take my broom back."

Remus almost opened his mouth to protest - he couldn't possibly go to the hospital wing, which he'd only escaped a few hours ago. Madam Pomfrey would never let him leave again once she saw the mess he'd got himself into against her orders. But Sirius was offering him a way out, so he took it.

He accepted the offer of Sirius's arm, and got up, stiffly. *Ow*, he thought again. He'd badly bruised one of his knees, and his hip was worse than ever. He staggered slightly, but Sirius allowed him to lean into him. He was still in his crimson quidditch robes, trimmed with gold, though he'd taken off the helmet, his hair coming loose from its ponytail. He smelled mildly of perspiration, fresh air and grass.

"I'll come too!" Mary chirped, getting up. She was taking her position as queen consort of Gryffindor very seriously.

"No, it's fine," Sirius said, firmly but kindly, "We don't need a big fuss, do we, Moony? C'mon."

He gave Mary a quick peck on the cheek before leading Remus down the last few steps, and off

the quidditch pitch back towards the castle.

Remus pulled away, as soon as he thought he could walk unassisted, and Sirius let him, but kept a steady pace, so that it would take them a long time to get back.

“We don’t have to go and see Pomfrey if you think you’re ok.” He said, quickly, “I just thought you’d like to get away from that lot.”

“Yeah... cheers,” Remus nodded, cautious.

“I know you hate people worrying over you.”

“Yeah.”

“Moony? How did you actually fall? You never fall over, even after a moon.”

“Oh, I dunno. Wasn’t looking where I was going.”

Sirius seemed to accept this for now, and they kept walking. It must have taken almost half an hour for them to make it all the way up to Gryffindor Tower. Sometimes Remus wished he was a Hufflepuff if only for accessibility purposes. Finally there, Remus collapsed onto his bed, aching all over and completely exhausted. He hated being that way in front of Sirius. He didn’t want to show any sign of weakness.

“I’m just going to have a shower, if that’s ok?” Sirius said, quietly. Remus nodded, closing his eyes.

Once the bathroom door clicked shut, he fumbled in his bedside table for the murtlap essence. He’d need more, after the next moon, though this jar had lasted longer than any other he’d had, thanks to the marauders. He raised his trouser leg, and found the pin prick. Bastards. It was angry red and raised, slightly, like a mosquito bite. The skin around the puncture was turning deep bruise purple. The murtlap essence didn’t help at all. Definitely silver, then.

Remus lay down and tried to ignore the pain, allowing his muscles to relax and sleep to take over. He was still lying in this dozy, slightly feverish state when Sirius emerged from the bathroom, a waft of muggy steam and faint aftershave.

“Are you sleeping?” He whispered, so gently.

“Almost,” Remus murmured, opening his eyes just a bit.

Sirius drew the curtains closed, dimming the light in the room. He stood just by Remus’s bed. He picked up the jar of murtlap essence.

“What’s this for? Cut yourself?”

“No...”

“Moony, please tell me what happened? It obviously wasn’t an accident.” Sirius frowned, “Don’t you trust me?”

“Of course, I trust you,” Remus frowned back, “I just... look, I don’t need you going out for revenge, ok? It’s stupid, and it’ll blow over.”

“Who?”

“Three Slytherins. They tripped me - yanked my foot through the stairs, that’s all. Cowardly gits.” Best not to mention the silver.

“Which Slytherins?” Sirius’s voice was hard.

“Not Regulus.” Remus replied, hurriedly, “Snape, obviously. Mulciber and Crouch. Sirius,” he said, as sternly as he could muster, “I’m fine, ok? Please don’t make it worse.”

“I won’t.” Sirius said, though he sounded uncertain. They were quiet for a bit. Remus closed his eyes again, his eyelids heavy. “Shall I leave you to sleep?” Sirius asked, his voice gentle again.

“Yeah, cheers,” Remus murmured, relaxing again.

“I’m knackered too,” Sirius said, lightly, with half a laugh, “After that match. Sort of jealous of you for having the excuse. Almost wish I could just lie down here with you and not get up again until tomorrow.”

Remus opened his eyes again, to check Sirius’s face, but he was looking away. “Better get down for the feast, though. Can’t miss James’s victory speech.”

“Don’t go near the Slytherins,” Remus said, “Promise?”

“Promise.” Sirius nodded.

He left the room shortly after that, and Remus fell asleep feeling satisfied that no matter how much Sirius hated Slytherin, he would never do anything so reckless that Remus could not forgive him it.

Fifth Year: OWLs

Chapter Summary

Spoilers for Order of the Phoenix in this chapter.
CW for bullying.

Chapter Notes

This chapter references the flashback scene in 'Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix', Chapter 28: Snape's Worst Memory. Feel free to go back and read that beforehand, because I haven't re-hashed that scene in any way - JK Rowling wrote it just fine the first time around, and in the context of this fic it happens exactly as described by her.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When I see you walking down the street

I step on your hands and I mangle your feet.

You're not the kinda person that I even wanna meet

Oh baby, you're so vicious!

Thursday 3rd June 1976

OWLs were every bit as terrifying and satisfying as Remus had anticipated. He tried to pretend they were nothing more than the usual end of year exams, but this was almost impossible when everybody else seemed to have lost their heads over it. James became a veritable recluse, holed up in the library or behind his bed curtains obsessively memorising facts and dates he had spent the rest of the year ignoring. Peter occasionally turned very pale and stared, trembling, into space. Marlene had taken to ambushing Remus at various intervals throughout the day, demanding that he quiz her on this or that.

Only Sirius seemed calm about any of it, which was just typical. When even James had shut him out, he entertained himself by distracting Mary. Which had the added benefit of distracting Remus, which was horrible, but bearable.

“Go and find a broom cupboard like everyone else!” Marlene yelled, on the edge of hysteria, throwing a slipper at the couple. They were wound together on the couch in front of the fireplace.

“There’s nowhere to go, though,” Mary sighed to Remus, in the library the day before OWLs were due to begin. “Sirius won’t let me up into your dorm, and boys can’t get in ours... and I don’t dare get caught in a cupboard somewhere, not with this castle crawling with wannabe death eaters.”

“What?” Remus finally paid attention, “Has someone tried to hurt you, Mary?”

“Oh, all the time,” she shrugged, with a tired smile, “I’m used to it by now. At least being the only black kid at my primary school prepared me for something.”

“That’s horrible, Mary, I’m sorry.” Remus squeezed her hand, feeling genuinely terrible. Mary was a very tough girl, he knew - you could get away with saying almost anything around her. She might throw a bit of a strop, but she’d forgive you quickly afterwards, and never hold it against you. Still; this was something else entirely, and it was obviously having an effect.

“You’re so sweet, Remus,” she smiled kindly, squeezing his hand back. “Don’t worry about me, though. I’ve got Sirius.”

“Mm.” Remus released her hand, returning to his work before casually asking, “What does he say about it?”

“Oh, y’know, that he’ll defend me to the death, that nothing they do can ever come between us... to be honest, I think he has a bit of a white knight complex.”

“Well.” Remus closed his book and looked up at her, “You’re no damsel in distress.”

Mary’s face split in a lovely grin. She really was very beautiful.

“Cheers, Remus, knew I could count on you to support the women’s lib argument. Right, can we go over the Defence Against the Dark Arts paper again? Professor Droskie hinted there’d be something on either werewolves or vampires...”

Remus would never know whether it was the increased attacks on muggleborns - and therefore Mary - that caused the incident which took place after the DADA written exam. He flattered himself, once or twice, that it could have had something to do with Severus’s dogged pursuit of Remus, even though Sirius had promised not to retaliate. He liked to think, later on, that James and Sirius had acted out of a kind of righteous indignation; that this was a chance to prove they had picked a side.

In reality, it was probably a mixture of reasons; none of them noble - the heightened tension of OWLs, combined with the relief of having just finished an exam. Growing tensions that had been simmering all year - in fact, for a number of years - between Gryffindor and Slytherin. Severus Snape simply being an annoying prick, James wanting to impress Lily, Sirius’s merciless aggression towards anyone who so much as hinted allegiance to ‘the other side’.

In short, no one was quite themselves that day, and it was hot - these two factors alone might have been enough to bring a situation to boiling point. The fact that Sirius was playing the bored aristocrat, and that James was eager to please him was nothing new - and could potentially be explained away later as obnoxious teenage behaviour. Besides, those who knew Sirius, and what he had suffered, were inclined to pander to him; allow him to put on airs - and James was particularly indulgent.

The level of cruelty was certainly new, and could not be explained so easily.

Unfortunately, as the years would go on, Remus would see more and more of this ruthlessness - not always from his friends, but certainly from people he had thought were ‘good’. It would always seem to Remus that this was the day the war truly started, as far as the marauders were concerned.

Remus did not consider himself blameless, of course. He could have stepped in. He did put down his Transfiguration book when Lily got involved - but he had assumed she would shut everything down, scold James and move on. He certainly hadn’t expected Snape to say what he had said, or

for James to do what he did next.

Part of him had enjoyed it, too. Part of him liked seeing Snape humiliated and tormented, without Mulciber around to back him up. It was horrible to see Lily so insulted, of course, and when James started really going for it, Remus had to bite his lip to keep from cheering and laughing along with everyone else. He ought to have stopped it. He ought to have stood up to his friends, taken control and been the better man. He just didn't feel like it.

Whether or not his intervention would have improved or worsened the situation - or the events that followed - Remus might never know. But he did wish he had tried.

* * *

"You've blown any chance you ever had of being with her now, mate." Sirius laughed, as Lily stormed out of the dining hall later that day, upon seeing James at the table.

"Fine." James said, scowling. "Do you know what, I've wasted too much bloody time pining after her, and if that's how she feels--"

"Isn't it how she's always felt?" Peter asked, pouring out his gravy glumly. Another casualty of the altercation with Snape - Peter and Desdemona had apparently had a blazing row over it. She thought it was bullying; she couldn't see what Snape had done wrong.

"Shut it, Pettigrew." Sirius rolled his eyes. He addressed James, "Forget about her, Prongs, she's always been up herself."

"Oi," Mary slapped his thigh lightly, "Lily's my *friend*, if you don't mind. Though, James, I do think you'd better leave her alone for a bit. She's really upset."

"Really?" Remus asked, feeling guilty. He ought to have stopped it.

"Of course!" Mary replied, neatly slicing up her roast potatoes, "Don't ask me why, but Snivellus has been her best friend since they were kids. I've tried telling her what a massive tosser he is, but it doesn't really get through. She feels sorry for him, I think. He's madly in love with her, of course."

"Eurgh, she doesn't like him back, does she?!" James looked scandalised.

"No," Mary shrugged, "But they're friends all the same. Or at least they *were*. She's not talking to him, now."

Remus made a mental note to check whether she was ok - that was, if Lily was still speaking to *him*. Her final outburst had definitely felt like an attack on all of the marauders, not just James.

* * *

Friday 12th June 1976

The Transfiguration written exam was the following week, and Remus was over prepared, if anything. He had a burning desire to beat James, if he couldn't beat Sirius at it. He thought he could probably best them in the written if he couldn't in the practical. The paper was three hours long, and demanded a huge amount of concentration.

Remus only looked up twice, both times to check on Sirius. The first time, he was working on his essay, his quill moving smoothly, as if skating over the parchment, rather than scribbling away like

James or Peter. The second time, he was leaning back on his chair, trying to catch James's eye. Remus sighed. It was so much harder to concentrate this close to the moon. He felt more animal than usual.

He was really looking forward to the upcoming moon, as much as he knew it was foolish. It would be the last one of the school year, and all four of them had been planning it quietly over the past week. Exams would be finished, and they were practically invincible, with what felt like the whole world at their feet. James swore he had caught a glimpse of a unicorn last time, and they'd been reading up on how to track them down. Remus wasn't sure what the wolf might do, faced with a unicorn, but there was no evidence he would attack. Centaurs were something else altogether - centaurs terrified the wolf.

When the exam finished, the students were instructed to stand back against the walls of the Great Hall while McGonagall magically collected in all of the papers alphabetically (in the most elegant use of *accio* Remus had ever seen) and reinstated the house tables ready for dinner. Across the hall, Snape was glaring at James furiously.

"Dunno what more he wants," James tutted, "We've got detention, haven't we?"

"Did a teacher see you?" Mary asked, as they wended their way over to their usual seats for dinner.

"Nah, bloody Evans." Sirius groaned.

"My *dear friend Lily*," Mary said, firmly.

"Whatever." Sirius grunted. "She just better not drag it out until tomorrow night."

"Why?" Mary asked, smiling as dinner appeared on the empty plates before them. Spaghetti Bolognese. "Taking me somewhere nice, for once?"

"I think the sixth floor girl's loo *is* nice." Sirius replied sarcastically. "Anyway, no. Got something else. Marauder business."

"Oh yeah, of course," Mary sighed, as if she was terribly hard done by, "I forgot I have to share my boyfriend with *his* boyfriends."

James and Peter snickered, but Sirius bristled like a cat.

"Fuck's sake," he spat, looking daggers at her from across the table, "Why do you have to say shit like that? Spiteful cow."

"Pureblood snob." She returned, sweetly, twirling spaghetti on her fork.

"Please," Remus said, battling a headache, "Peter and Desdemona are arguing this week. You'll get your turn next week."

That made everyone laugh, and went some way to calming the atmosphere. Remus was pleased with himself. He was really getting the hang of the whole relationship thing, without ever having to actually be in one.

By the time dinner was over, all was well again, and when James got up to go for detention, Sirius told him he would catch up later.

"I want to make sure Mary gets back to the tower ok," he explained.

"You don't have to," she said, "I'm not going alone, Remus is coming too, aren't you Remus?"

"Yeah," he nodded, hoisting his book bag up onto his shoulder, "I'm finally going to read something with a plot, now exams are over."

"Such a thrilling life you lead, Moony," Sirius smirked. He clasped Mary's hand, "Still, I'd rather come with you. So I don't worry."

"How can you be such a prick one minute and then so sweet the next?" Mary sighed, kissing him.

Remus looked away, politely. That was very much the question, with Sirius, he thought. That was exactly what you were getting yourself into with him.

"All right, but don't be too long," James said, "Detention is with Filch. Evans is a sadist, I swear."

"Won't take fifteen minutes." Sirius assured him, and they set off, the three of them, Remus walking just a bit behind the whole way.

"Oh, for god's sake." Mary said loudly, as they reached the portrait hole, and Remus peered around to see what the holdup was. Ah. Of course. Snape again. Reflexively, Remus reached for his wand. "Look, she's not interested in talking to you, so bugger off!" Mary snapped, still holding Sirius's hand.

"Black," Severus drawled, "Tell your muggle bitch to shut up."

"What did you call me?!" Mary shrieked, as Sirius whipped out his own wand and raised it.

This is the time, Remus thought to himself, *this is the time to be a prefect. This is the time to be brave.* Sirius had just opened his mouth when Remus stepped forward, standing between the two dark haired boys.

"Stop it right now!" He said, in his most dangerous voice, "Snape, go back to your own common room, or I'll give you detention. Black, just... calm down, ok?"

Sirius was red in the face, and did not lower his wand. Snape cocked an eyebrow,

"Listen to him, Black, even *Loony Lupin* knows you couldn't beat me in a duel."

"That's not what I said," Remus hissed, "Shut up and get lost."

"Should I get someone?" Mary asked, nervously watching Sirius's face.

"No, it's ok... just go in." Remus said, watching her crawl through the portrait hole. He turned back to Sirius, "Come on, you've got detention now, let's go..."

"You're not looking well, Loony Lupin." Severus said, suddenly. Remus turned, confused. What fresh hell?! "Coming up on your time of the month, is it?"

The implication was clear. Remus was speechless, shocked. He gaped, finding his voice,

"You... you don't know what you're talking about!"

Snape smiled, obviously thrilled to have wrought such a reaction. He looked at Sirius, now,

"*You* all know, of course. You and Potter and that little rodent, Pettigrew? You know what he is? I always wondered why three purebloods would want to waste their time on filthy scum like him, but

now I see - he's your little pet project, isn't he, Black?"

"Confringo!"

"Expelliarmus!"

Remus and Sirius both shouted their incantations at the same time, but Remus was quicker, and had Sirius's wand in his hand before any further damage could be done. He rounded on Snape now.

"I don't know what you think you know," he said, very low, standing over the Slytherin boy, pointing two wands directly at his face, "But whatever it is, you're wrong. Now get back to the dungeons before I summon McGonagall."

Snape, who had paled very slightly, gave a minuscule nod before edging around the two Gryffindors and slinking away, down the corridor. Remus didn't take the wands off him until he was definitely gone, and he didn't give Sirius's back until the last moment. Sirius snatched it and glared at him,

"What did you do that for?!"

"Sirius! Do you want another detention?!"

"Didn't you hear the things he said about Mary?! The things he said about you?!"

"Of course I did." Remus folded his arms, coldly. "And he's a complete knob. A complete knob who you humiliated yesterday, and who you promised me you wouldn't go after."

"Yeah, but---"

"You promised, Sirius." Remus stared him down. He saw the look in Sirius's eyes - he had just realised that they were completely alone, and standing quite close. He stepped back, smartly,

"I know what I said," he replied, his voice still thick with rage, "But I won't have him spreading rumours about you! He deserves a taste of his own bloody medicine."

"Sirius," Remus moaned, "Please, just... just go to your detention and calm down, ok? I'll see you later."

Years later, Remus would look back on that conversation with the benefit of hindsight, and scold himself for leaving things that way. But they were not yet the men they would become, and as much as Remus liked to think he was mature and intuitive - he was about to learn that he still didn't know the first thing about Sirius.

Besides, he didn't have the patience. The moon was coming.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is from 'Vicious' by Lou Reed.

Fifth Year: The week following

Chapter Summary

No specific CWs, but it's not super cheerful, so if you're having a tough time at the moment, be kind to yourself.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Anyone who ever had a heart

Wouldn't turn around and break it

And anyone who ever played a part

Wouldn't turn around and hate it.

Sunday 13th June 1976

Everything hurts, was Remus's first thought upon waking. The next thought was - *where are they?* No one had ever come. It was warm, too warm for June, and his heart would not stop pounding with the remnants of the wolf's frustration. He clambered to his feet, and staggered to the bed, dripping blood.

It was supposed to have been their final hurrah, he thought, miserably. They were supposed to chase unicorns. What had happened?

At once he began to worry - something awful must have taken place, something really terrible, for none of the marauders to come at all. Any one of them on their own might have been able to sit with him, at least, just keep him company. Even Wormtail.

"Good morning, dear," Madam Pomfrey entered the room quickly. She was more nervous than usual, he could smell it on her. Something had happened. Only he couldn't ask what, could he? "Oh, you poor thing, it's been a bit of a night all round, eh?" She began to heal his most pressing wounds.

"What do you mean, 'all round'?" He asked, trying not to sound too anxious.

"Oh... nothing, dear, nothing to worry about at all."

In the hospital wing, he would have tried to stay awake, but Madam Pomfrey stood over him to make sure he finished his sleeping draught, and he was out like a light.

"Remus? ... psst... you awake?"

Remus opened his eyes, bleary and irritated, to see the fuzzy image of James float into view. Just James's head.

“Prongs?” He croaked,

“Shh,” James murmured, barely moving his lips, “Pomfrey won’t let anyone in to see you, had to sneak in under the cloak. You ok?”

“Not really,” He could feel the new scars already, without moving. “What happened? You didn’t come.”

His friend had an unfamiliar expression. Unfamiliar in James’s features, anyway. Was it shame?

“I’m really sorry, Moony.”

“Why?! What happened?” Remus asked again, his voice hardening. “I can’t remember anything.”

“It was... Godric, I don’t know how to tell you.”

“Try.”

Where was Sirius? Why wasn’t he here?! Remus wanted to scream it.

“Look, please don’t be too angry with him, ok? He’s an idiot, a bloody stupid idiot, but I don’t think he realised, I don’t think he meant...”

Ah. It dawned on Remus all too quickly.

“James. What did Sirius do?”

James had never once been dishonest for as long as Remus had known him. And yet, as the story poured out of him, it was still tempered with little white lies - whether they were meant to protect Remus or Sirius, it wasn’t clear. Sirius hadn’t been thinking; he had been reckless; he hadn’t meant any harm.

But he had caused a great deal of harm, whether he meant to or not - and might have been responsible for much more.

“He... told Snape.” Remus said, trying to get a grip on the situation, feeling a horrible, sick, prickly sensation beginning in his stomach and creeping upwards.

“Not... not exactly,” James blinked, wetting his lips, “He told him how the willow worked, and Snape... you know what Snape’s like.”

“I know what Sirius is like.”

James nodded, as if accepting that this was fair enough.

“No one got hurt. Sirius bottled it at the last minute and told me, I managed to stop Sniv—Snape—from getting too close, but...”

“He saw me.” Remus thought he might be sick. There was a terrible roaring inside his ears, as if he was falling into a dark pit, a desperate canyon. He closed his eyes. “Can you go away, please, James?”

“And we would have come, me and Pete, we would have, but Snape went to Dumbledore, and you were so riled up--”

“James! I want you to go.” He hissed, closing his eyes.

“But Moony...”

“Please.”

“...Ok, mate. Ok. But I’ll be back.”

Remus said nothing, did not even open his eyes again until he heard the curtain rustling and knew he was alone. Eventually, Madam Pomfrey poked her head around the corner.

“Hello, dear,” she said, softly, “I’ve got another sleeping potion here... now I know you don’t want it, but--”

“Give it here,” he reached out an aching arm at once. Anything to make it all go away. Anything which meant he would not have to think any more.

He ought to have seen something like this coming even if James hadn’t. Sirius had been in freefall since Christmas, it had just been a matter of who he would crush when he finally landed.

* * *

Monday 14th June 1976

Remus Lupin would never, ever forgive Sirius Black.

It was a decision he made almost the very instant he woke up the second time after that terrible moon. The weight of it all came crashing down on him, and he felt a rage so pure it burnt like a fever. This is how betrayal feels.

He had not been angry like that in a very long time. At the end of his fourth year, Remus had quietly made a choice to lower his defences, to soften and relax – at least around his friends. Keeping everyone at a distance - keeping everyone slightly afraid of you - had proved too exhausting to keep up for very long.

But now. Now, Remus found it very easy indeed. He barely spoke to Madam Pomfrey, except to demand to be allowed an extra few nights in the hospital wing.

“Really, Remus, rest is important, but staying in bed all day isn’t healthy. You need exercise.”

“I don’t feel well.” He would repeat, from under the covers. It was childish, but she let him be childish. She knew what had happened. She felt sorry for him. The nurse tutted, and signed him in for another night.

Dumbledore was the worst. The bringer of bad news, as always, he had arrived the evening after it happened, to offer his own useless perspective on the situation. Remus sat up in bed, arms crossed, unflinching and unmoving.

“Mr Snape has calmed down considerably, you may be pleased to hear.” Dumbledore said, “He certainly had a fright, but he has been persuaded to act in the best interests of his school and his fellow pupils.”

Remus snorted at this. Dumbledore did not react.

“So, no harm done. Your friend, Mr Black--”

“Not my friend.” Remus said, without looking at Dumbledore. He stared forward.

“Remus...”

“Is he expelled?”

“No.” Dumbledore said, quietly, “What Sirius did was incredibly foolish, incredibly dangerous. But it was a mistake. I have no doubt that he is truly repentant. He has learnt a valuable lesson, here.”

“Oh, brilliant.” Remus snorted again, tightening his arms as if they were all that kept him together, “As long as the Black heir has learnt a good moral lesson. As long as it’s benefited his personal development,”

“Remus...”

“As long as we can all look back on this and think, ah what an excellent parable! Thank goodness we all know now exactly what happens when you send your enemy after a deadly fucking monster!”

“Remus!”

He stopped, his face hot, and finally looked at Dumbledore. Cool, forget-me-not blue eyes stared back at him. Remus was reminded of their first meeting. He’d been rude then, too, and angry. “You have every right to feel what you are feeling.” Dumbledore said, calm as ever. “And rest assured, Sirius will be punished.”

Remus wanted to mumble something sarcastic about the effectiveness of detentions when it came to Sirius Black. He didn’t. Dumbledore continued. “I will caution you now, as I did once before, when a childish prank got out of hand. Passion is an important quality, but we must all learn to exercise control.”

“Bit late for that.”

“You have been horribly let down by somebody close to you, and I’m very sorry. But you cannot let this incident--”

“People close to me have been letting me down since I was five.” Remus said, bitterly, “I’m used to it. Anyway,” he hunched down in his bed, wishing Dumbledore would go away and leave him in peace, “We weren’t that close.”

“That’s a pity.” Dumbledore replied. He stood up. “Because we will all need each other more than ever, soon enough. Forgive and forget, Remus.”

Remus did not say goodbye, he just rolled back over and tried to sleep.

* * *

Madam Pomfrey would not let him stay for three nights in a row. He went straight to Professor McGonagall instead. He knocked twice on the door, then barged straight in.

“Remus! Are you quite well?”

“Send me back.”

“Excuse me?” His head of house stood up from where she’d been sitting behind her desk.

“Send me back.” He repeated, clenched fists, “To St. Edmund’s. Exams are finished, I don’t need

to be here.”

“Remus, the term is not finished. Unless you are unwell, I cannot send you anywhere.”

“So, I’m a prisoner?”

“Of course not, you silly boy. Sit down.”

He thought about refusing, or even storming straight back out again. But she was so stern, and something drilled into him at an early age forced him to obey the raised voices of older women. She sat too, the colour in her face going down. She swished her wand, and a kettle appeared, along with two cups and saucers, “Tea, Mr Lupin?”

“No thanks.”

“Come along now,” she tutted, pouring him a cup anyway, “I find that most unpleasant conversations can be made easier with the right refreshments. Help yourself to a biscuit.” She nodded to a plate which had not been there a moment before.

“I’m fine. I just want to go.” He said, his voice as level as he could keep it.

“Yes, that much has been made clear.” She sipped her tea, “But I’m not going to send you back to St Edmund’s.”

“Tell Madam Pomfrey to let me sleep in the hospital wing, then.”

“I shall do no such thing. You have a perfectly good bed in Gryffindor Tower.”

“I can’t go there.”

“Gryffindors do not run away from our problems, Mr Lupin.”

“Yeah, but Slytherins run away from werewolves.” He spat. He looked at her, fixing her with a glare he thought he had almost perfected, now, “I would have been arrested. Sent to Azkaban, or, or... or put down! I wouldn’t even know I’d done anything - and it’s all his fault!”

Oh no, he had to stop there. He was in quite serious danger of bursting into tears, and that could not happen. Under no circumstances was Remus going to cry over this.

McGonagall was kind, and waited for him to compose himself. He took a few short breaths, letting his curls fall in front of his face before finally he was able to meet her eye again. “I can’t sleep in a room with the person who did that.”

“That is perfectly reasonable.” She said, gently.

He blinked.

“What?”

“I’m not completely heartless, Mr Lupin,” she smiled, “Believe me, I know how you must feel - I can imagine, at least. And I can tell you, I have had serious words with Mr Black myself – he’s off the quidditch team, detention for the rest of the year, one hundred points lost... But we cannot make any drastic changes to your sleeping arrangements, not without anyone asking why.”

It clicked. For the past few days, Remus had placed his pain at the centre of the universe. He had forgotten that no one else in the school knew a thing.

“Oh.” Was all he could muster.

“I am sorry, Remus,” McGonagall said. “It’s a horrendous cruelty. But it must be borne.”

“That reminds me.” He fished in his pocket for his prefect’s badge. He’d broken the transfiguration spell on it and wrapped it in tissue paper, but it still felt hot in his hand. He placed it on the desk.

“Take that back. Give it to... I dunno, give it to James. I can’t do it any more.”

“Remus,” McGonagall sounded sad now, pleading, “Don’t let this set you back. Talk to your friends.”

He shrugged,

“Can I go?”

* * *

He went to the library. Where else? It would be simple enough for the marauders to find him if they wanted to, but then, they had the map too. There was nowhere to hide, except maybe the Shrieking Shack, and Remus would be damned if he ever spent longer in there than absolutely necessary.

Fortunately, everyone else seemed to be outside enjoying the early summer sunshine, leaving the library pretty much empty. He read - or tried to, anyway. It wasn’t easy to concentrate when his own brain kept interrupting.

Should never ‘ave snogged ‘im.

Look, piss off, I’m not in the mood.

Oh charming! You’re the one who keeps trying to chat.

I want to talk to Grant, not you. You’re a shit substitute.

Well, you’ve gotta ask yourself what that says about you, doncha. Find someone real to chat to, if you’re so keen.

...What’s it got to do with the kiss?

Ooooh, it’s a ‘kiss’ now, is it? Snogging’s good enough for Grant, but for the great and glorious Sirius Black it’s ‘kissing’ lah-dee-dah!

Either be helpful or leave me alone.

I told you – or the real Grant told you – not to kiss him. You thought you got off easy when he decided to ignore it, but now you’re paying.

You’re saying I did this.

S’what it sounds like.

That’s not very kind.

Was I supposed to be?

I miss Grant.

Tough luck.

Eventually, it began to get dark. He missed dinner – he didn't think he could bring himself to eat in front of the marauders anyway. He just waited. It was only two weeks to go until term ended. He could avoid them that long; he'd done it before. Stay in the library, get up early, go to bed late. Piece of cake.

He was chased out of the library at nine o'clock, and – starving hungry by now – took a detour to the kitchens. The house elves there were only too happy to serve, building a plate of sandwiches, crisps and sweets, enough to feed a whole classroom. Remus scoffed the lot, and could have asked for seconds. But it was time to bite the bullet.

He walked slowly, as if that might help, and was waylaid by Lily, on prefect patrol.

"Hiya," she smiled, "Feeling better?"

"Yeah, much." He nodded. "How are you?"

She looked down, fiddled with her hair.

"Oh, y'know. Fine. Sev's stopped lurking outside the common room now, at least."

"Sorry about all of that..."

"It wasn't your fault," she waved a hand, "I really thought that... oh, it's stupid, but I thought that maybe one day, he'd change his mind about all of that pureblood nonsense, and when he did, I'd still be there. Like all I had to do was just keep being his friend, and everything would just work out for the best. Stupid." She shook her head.

"Not that stupid." He replied, because it seemed like a nice thing to say.

"Yeah, well. Could have saved myself a lot of heartache," she shrugged, stoically. "What are you doing wandering around, anyway? Go to bed, you've not been well!"

He smiled at her – he hadn't smiled for ages. He was about to turn and keep going, when something made him change his mind. He bent down and wrapped his arms around Lily, squeezing her. She hugged back, which only made him grip harder, until he had lifted her off her feet, and she squealed, laughing,

"God, you're stronger than you look, Lupin!"

"Sorry." He blushed, setting her down.

"No, it was nice," she smiled up at him, patting his shoulder, "You ok?"

"Yeah."

He didn't feel ok, entering the common room. Fortunately, it was very quiet. Some students still had exams, others were wiped out after a long day in the hot sun. The marauders were not there, but they had been recently.

Remus knew exactly what he was going to do. It had fallen into place in the library, as he mulled

over the first confrontation like a play he had to rehearse.

He went up the stairs. It was silly, he knew, but ever since his birthday, he had lingered – just for a second – on that one step in the staircase, every time he went up to bed, or down for breakfast. This castle kept memories – the marauder’s map had taught him that much. And that step had held Remus’s sweetest memory of all. He stepped over it now, resolute.

He pushed the door open with some force, startling the three boys inside. They were sitting on their beds. Peter was in his pyjamas, looking glum – Remus could only assume that meant no change with Desdemona. James was half undressed, rattling around in his bedside cabinet for something. Sirius was reclining, clearly about to make a sarcastic comment. When Remus entered, he sat up straight.

Remus walked straight to his own bed, and picked up his pyjamas. He did not speak, but went straight for the bathroom, which he locked, then cast a silencing spell over. He didn’t want to hear them. He wasn’t sure how he’d react to it.

He washed. He brushed his teeth. He put on his night things. Remus was more than aware that he lost some of his authority when dressed in a pair of baggy blue and white pyjama bottoms and a greying vest, but he had quite a few new scars, and didn’t want to undress in front of them. He took a deep breath. He walked out, crossing quickly to his bed.

“Moony, I...” Sirius started.

Remus ignored him, and turned to James,

“Thank you for stopping Severus, James.” He said, emotionlessly. “You saved both our lives.”

“Er...” James started, but Remus had climbed into bed, and closed his curtains with a flick.

Well . He thought to himself. *That’s that, then.*

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'Sweet Jane', by The Velvet Underground. There are a few different versions, but the best one is on '1969 vol.1'.

Fifth Year: Closing

Chapter Summary

CW - Remus has some pretty violent thoughts in this chapter.

Tuesday 30th June 1976

"I'm sorry," said Sirius Black, with big, anxious eyes, standing behind Remus as he brushed his teeth.

"I'm sorry," murmured Sirius Black, low over the breakfast table, before Mary had arrived.

"I'm sorry!" Pleaded Sirius Black, as Remus walked away again.

"I'm sorry..." whispered Sirius Black, as Remus closed his bed curtains every night.

So let him suffer, said the cruellest part of Remus, the part that had been hurt the most. He turned his head, he walked away, he closed doors and he shut his eyes. *Sorry isn't good enough*, he said, with every action. *I don't know what is*.

James and Peter watched, cautiously, out of the corners of their eyes. They knew not to get involved - though James undoubtedly bore the brunt of Sirius's distress; the late-night meetings had returned with a vengeance.

The girls noticed that something was wrong, but they weren't sure what - Lily thought he was nervous about going back to St Edmund's, Marlene thought he was worrying about OWL results. Remus went along with both notions gratefully. After all, he was doing everything he could bear to act as normally as possible. He joined the marauders for meals, he sat in his usual place, he read his books, he played chess with Peter, gobstones with James. In the evenings, he climbed the stairs to bed.

But he did not speak to Sirius. For the remaining two weeks of June, Remus didn't say so much as a word in his direction. He didn't even look at him, if he could help it.

He had the feeling, after the first week, that perhaps James didn't completely approve of this. Potter was furious on Remus's behalf, of course - at least in the facts of the matter - but James could be very blind when it came to Sirius's less excusable flaws. James would have forgiven him after the first apology.

Maybe Remus was a weaker man. But he wouldn't be weak any more. He needed to get back to who he *really* was. *We can all learn our lesson*. Remus had tried being soft and open, like all of his rich, well-bred friends - where had it got him? He'd gone and fallen in love with his best friend, and almost got himself killed. He was ashamed of himself – mooning over Sirius like that. *Moony's mooning*. Sirius would find that hilarious.

So he started avoiding James and Peter, too.

He stopped going to lessons – that was the first thing. There weren't many to go to, of course, with the last exams taking place, and the whole school falling into summer holiday mode. Still, he had

introductory NEWT classes pencilled into his timetable in almost every subject except Potions - he couldn't wait to be rid of Potions.

The greenhouses were a good place to hide out. Remus found by the end of the year that he had spent nearly all of his carefully saved cash on cigarettes and weed. He told himself that was ok. Told himself he wouldn't need money to find and destroy Greyback, just the right scent and a full moon. Not that he thought about Greyback much. He tried not to think about anything for too long; anger gave way to a numbness which seemed easier to live with.

When he couldn't be outside, he went to the library and pretended to read. Students from his study group stopped by occasionally, but he always found a reason to leave as soon as possible.

"Hiya, Remus!" Christopher popped out from between the stacks one afternoon, "Glad I caught you! Can you recommend some summer reading? I'll be doing my OWLs next year!"

"What?" Remus frowned, groggily. He'd been just nodding off, and was annoyed at having been woken. He was sleeping a lot, lately, but never seemed to feel refreshed. "Oh, god, I dunno. They send you a book list."

"Yeah, but I thought you might have some good tips!" Christopher continued, relentlessly cheerful. "Especially in History, what did you do your final essay on?"

"Um... The Goblin Revolt." He shifted, trying to settle back onto his elbows.

"Cool! Hey, maybe I could write to you, over the summer? We can swap notes, and--"

"Look, Christopher, don't take this the wrong way, but could you please fuck off?"

He would feel guilty about it later, but at least the annoyance went away.

The marauders never tried to find him, as far as he knew – he had taken the map the first chance he had, and kept it in his pocket at all times. This had the added benefit of helping him keep out of Snape's. The only thing Remus wanted to avoid more than his rage at Sirius was his utter terror at the thought of running into Severus.

Snape had hated Remus before all of this – he was too close to Lily, he was friends with James, he had been responsible for coming up with at least half of the pranks on Slytherin. Since the incident, this obsession seemed to have deepened. He was still whispering at meal times, staring at Remus all the while, with a fresh kind of hatred that Remus could see would run and run. If Sirius had learnt a lesson from that awful night, then Remus certain that Snape had not.

Sirius was all too keen. He apologised, over and over – he never tried to explain himself, which was good, because if he had; if he had given an excuse, Remus didn't think he could control himself. It already took every ounce of nerve not to leap across the table, or the bedroom, or the common room and shake and punch and scream at Sirius - *you bastard, you bastard, you bastard.*

The apologies he could cope with. Background noise. He didn't rise to the bait. Not that he didn't have things to say – not that he didn't re-play the monologue over and over, editing and perfecting until it was a great stream of miserable defeat, circling his head, fuelling his mood.

Sorry isn't good enough. Your guilt isn't good enough. I need you to feel it too. I trusted you. I trusted you with every last secret, I offered you every piece of me. What else have I got, now? I could kill you. I could bash your teeth in so you choke on them, I could wrap my hands around your throat and squeeze, I could rip you to pieces, I could, I could, I could kiss you, you fucking bastard.

In his dreams, Remus said these things, and more. And always, in his dreams, Sirius stared back at him with calm contrition, as he removed his clothes and pulled Remus towards him. It appeared that betrayal was not enough to kill desire, though it made hiding it easier. By the time that wretched summer term ended, the only person Remus despised more than Sirius was himself, for continuing to love him just the same.

* * *

“Hello,” Lily said, gently, poking her head around the carriage door. “Wondered where you’d got to.”

Remus grunted, a small noise which was neither friendly nor rude. Lily came inside. “What are you doing here, all alone?”

Remus shrugged, sucking his cigarette like it was keeping him alive. He hunched down in his seat as she took the place opposite.

“Too crowded in there.” He said, by way of explanation.

“Know how you feel.” She replied. “...McGonagall told me you’ve given up being a prefect.”

“Yep.” He finished his cigarette. He lit another.

“Shame. You were good at it.”

“Liar,” he smirked. Her face lit up too,

“Yeah, ok, you were rubbish. But I’ll miss you on my rounds.”

She let this hang in the air for a moment, before frowning again. “Remus? Whatever’s going on with you and the other boys, I hope it gets better. You seem so miserable.”

“I’m fine.”

“Black’s off the quidditch team.”

“Is he?”

“What did he do?”

“Leave it, Evans, just go away.”

“You know, you can *talk* to me, I know how it feels to be let down by a friend...”

“How *is* Snivellus?” Remus snarled. He wished he could tell her that it wasn’t her fault, that he couldn’t help acting like a prick – that if he didn’t act this way, then he wasn’t really sure how to act at all.

“He’s... well I’m still not talking to him, as you know. He keeps trying, though. He... um... he had some pretty mad stories, actually... about you...”

Remus looked at her, finally. She looked nervous, her hands twisting in her lap. She looked a bit scared of him, actually. “I don’t believe them!” She said, suddenly.

“Don’t you?” He raised an eyebrow. He should have known this was coming.

“I mean, just because you’re... well, you do have a lot of scars – sorry – and you *do* get ill quite a lot, but that doesn’t mean... I hadn’t really thought about it, maybe it’s just a weird coincidence, Sev has always been a bit paranoid... and...”

He could have watched her squirm like that for ages, tangling herself up in apologies and unasked questions. But why bother. He could be reckless too.

“Lily.” He said, gently, stubbing out his last cigarette. “You can’t tell anybody.”

She stopped blathering, and stared at him. He saw her big green eyes widen even more, the look of surprise on her face so comical he could cry. Her breath hitched, then she nodded, resolute and quite serious.

“I won’t.” She said. “Promise.”

Summer 1976: Part One (London)

Chapter Summary

CW for hinted homophobia/violence, including police brutality.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Just a perfect day

Problems all left alone

Weekenders, on our own;

It's such fun.

Just a perfect day

You made me forget myself

I thought I was someone else

Someone good.

Wednesday 11th August 1976

St. Edmund's was less bearable than usual that summer. Remus was angry almost all of the time. It was too hot and he missed Hogwarts and he missed his friends and most of all he missed Sirius, but he also hated him. It was a huge mess. He missed Grant too; Grant, who might have made it all a bit more manageable, or at least offered some escapism.

But, as an unsatisfying conversation with another St Eddy's boy called Mike had told him, Grant had left St Edmund's shortly after Christmas. He was living in a flat in Mile End, apparently, though Remus didn't have much more information than that. ...and he *had* said Remus could come any time.

At least I'm not knocking over off licences or getting pissed on the common this time, he thought, as he planned his escape. As summer rebellions went, this one was perhaps the most healthy.

He waited until the second full moon of the summer had passed – on the tenth of August. On the eleventh, he waited for Madam Pomfrey to come and give him the all clear, and then he just left. He was sore, and extremely tired, but at the time he didn't feel he had any other option. He packed a small bag, without taking books or homework or his wand or anything at all that reminded him of Hogwarts. He would be a muggle for a few days; why not.

All Remus had to do was walk out into the garden and crawl through the fence at the back, just as he had been doing for years to get into town. From there, he simply walked to the nearest tube.

Theydon Bois underground station was about five miles away, but he did it easily in under two hours, even with a gammy hip. He couldn't afford a ticket, but it wasn't difficult to push through the barriers behind a group of suited business men on their way to work.

He got a seat on the train, and pretended to be asleep so that the ticket inspector wouldn't bother him, listening to the rattling rumbling roar of the train as the carriage whooshed along the tracks, like a great earthworm ploughing its way into central London.

Excitement pulsed in Remus's chest as he reached Mile End, where he hurried out of the carriage into the dimly lit green and white tiled station.

Mile End had been hit by a German bomb during the war and still hadn't recovered from the shock of it. It was a dirty, sprawling mess of a high street, littered with rubble and newspapers, children playing in the road, noise everywhere. The grim anonymity suited Remus. Who would come looking for him here? Who would find him?

He wandered for a bit, unsure what to do next. The information he'd been given was just a building name, no street address. But after asking in a newsagent, and quite literally following his nose, he found it.

It turned out that Grant didn't actually *have* a flat – not in the sense that he owned it, or was even renting it. As far as Remus could tell, it was a squat, shared with several other young men and women. He hadn't actually been expecting Remus, either.

"Bloody hell!" He exclaimed, when one of the girls finally brought him to the door, "What are *you* doin' 'ere?!"

Remus felt very foolish. He wasn't sure what sort of welcome he would have liked, but it wasn't that.

"You did say I could visit..."

"Yeah, sorry," Grant grabbed his shoulder and pulled him inside, "Sorry, I'm just a bit 'ungover, gimme a minute."

He led Remus into what appeared to be a kitchen. It smelled vaguely of curry and damp. There were bubbles in the wallpaper and holes in the yellow linoleum floor. Grant flicked on an electric kettle, "One of the girls sorted us out wiv a generator," he explained, "She's a mechanic or summink. Tea?"

Remus nodded. Tea usually helped.

Grant looked different. Only a year older than the last time Remus had seen him, he was thinner about the face. He'd lost some of the brightness in his eyes, and his blond hair was even longer; still curly, but badly in need of washing. He seemed to have chipped a tooth at some point as well, and a bruise the colour of old honey marred his left cheek. Even so, he still had the same friendly grin. He handed Remus a steaming mug and smiled at him.

"You look... well, like shit" he said, sipping from his own mug. "Been sleepin' rough?"

"Oh no," Remus shook his head, "I just got off the tube from St Edmund's."

"Oh yeah, 'ow's Matron? Kick you out, did she? Kicked me out, the old trollop."

"Nothing like that," Remus said, "I just... thought I'd visit. See how you were."

“Mike tell you where I was?”

“Yeah... so who is Mike?” Remus smiled at him shyly from behind his mug of tea.

“Oh, y’know,” Grant smirked, “Just some company for me. Couldn't pine over you all year, could I, posh boy?”

“He’s really thick.”

“Is he?” Grant looked mildly amused, “I never noticed. Didn’t really talk much.”

Remus snorted at this, and it felt *good*. Grant made him feel so normal; he could never comfortably joke about that sort of thing with the marauders, even when they were all on speaking terms.

The squat was cleaner than it first appeared, but still in a pretty bad state. There were six of them living there, between two bedrooms and a living room - which was visible through a beaded doorway across the hall. Apparently one of the boys even slept in the bathroom because none of the plumbing was connected anyway; the only working tap was in the kitchen.

“There’s a loo in the courtyard,” Grant explained, “Sometimes we can get in to use the showers at the boxing club next door.”

“Oi oi,” another young man had woken up from his spot on the sofa, “Make us a cuppa, Grant darlin’. Who’s this?” He was shirtless, dark skinned and gorgeous. He had the same faraway look Grant had now.

“Mate of mine from the children’s ‘ome,” Grant said, “Remus Lupin.”

“That’s never your name.” The stranger gawped at him.

“Straight up,” Grant replied on Remus’s behalf, “Goes to a posh school and everything, innit. Remus, this is Adz.”

“Blimey,” Adz stared at Remus, then back at Grant, “He one of us?”

Grant handed Adz a third mug of tea, and surveyed Remus, looking him up and down appraisingly. He nodded, very slightly. Remus wasn’t sure what that meant, but he had some idea. He stifled a yawn. Grant clucked sympathetically,

“You look dead on your feet.” He said. “Had one of your nights, ‘ave ya? Go and lie down if you want, I’ll kick ‘em all out of the bedroom, no one’ll bother ya.”

Remus nodded gratefully and was led into a dark and dingy room.

“Oi, you lazy gits, up you get. Got a mate ‘ere who needs a kip.”

Remus murmured an embarrassed apology to the four young men who clambered to their feet and milled out of the room. The beds seemed to be used on a rotating basis, and no one looked annoyed by this intrusion. One of the boys even winked at Remus.

Three sad single mattresses lay on the floor, strewn with old blankets and pillows. It smelt vaguely of mould, and strongly of unwashed bodies. Cardboard had been used to stop up the broken windows. Remus was glad it was the summer; it might have been freezing cold, otherwise. Despite it all, he slept easily, feeling that he had finally taken some control over his situation.

Grant woke him some hours later. He looked a little bit better – as if he'd had a good meal, at least. Remus's stomach rumbled.

"Wakey wakey," Grant chirped, holding another mug of tea. Remus sat up, rubbing his eyes. Some of the soreness leftover from the full moon was still there, but he felt better. It must have been midday, judging by the blazing rays of light coming through the gaps in the cardboard.

"Thanks," he rasped, sipping the tea, moving along so that Grant could sit beside him.

They sat in companionable silence for a little while, backs against the wall and legs splayed out in front of them.

"So," Grant said, finally, once he had judged Remus sufficiently awake, and half the tea was drunk. "Wanna tell me why you're 'ere?"

Remus shrugged,

"Just visiting. Sick of that place."

"Yeah, well I know that feeling." Grant sighed, "Ain't you goin' back to school in a few weeks, though?"

"Yeah. Maybe." He knew he had to. There was nowhere else to go.

"Sick of that place too, eh?" Grant nudged him, gently teasing. "Go on, tell us what happened. Get yer heart broken?"

Remus looked at him, startled. Grant chuckled, "Yeah, thought so. Who is 'e, then?"

"It's not..." Remus stuttered, "It's not that, it's complicated. My friend just... let me down."

"Yeah, they always do," Grant nodded sagely. "Bet they're the worst for it, public schoolboys, eh? 'Specially with us peasants."

"It wasn't like that at all!"

"Yeah, yeah." He waved a dismissive hand, "Tell yourself you're different if you like. Stay away from toffs, if you want my advice, we're just a bit of fun to them. Keep to your own kind."

"This isn't about *class* ." Remus said, angrily. Grant glanced down at him, sympathetically, as if he was much older and wiser.

"'ave a look around Remus," he said, gesturing to the dank room they were in, "We're British. It's always about class."

Remus looked down at his chipped mug of greyish tea. Grant was probably right. What else was this stupid war all about? He felt he ought to say something else - something witty or clever. He stared at the tea and just felt sad. He might lose it, if he spoke. Grant set his own mug down on the wooden floor, and touched Remus's hand.

"You're going to be ok. It stops hurting after a while."

"I..."

No, it was no good, Remus had lost it. He sniffed a few times, trying harder than ever not to cry, but the tears came, and he was too tired. Grant put an arm around him, and Remus leaned on his

shoulder, sobbing softly, hiccuping every now and then, like a little child. Grant kissed his head, softly, and whispered into his hair, "Ain't no shame in it," which only made him cry harder.

It was a good thing, maybe. Once he'd finally calmed down he felt like he'd had a good long sleep. He wiped his nose on his sleeve, and straightened up, looking for something else to talk about.

"Is everyone here... um... you know...?" He asked, shyly.

"Queer? Yeah, most of us. Nowhere else to go. Coppers leave us alone if we leave them alone."

"Police? But it isn't a crime!"

"Is for someone your age." Grant raised an eyebrow. "Age of consent is twenty-one for us deviants."

"Oh right, yeah. But I haven't... I mean I wasn't going to..."

Grant laughed and ruffled Remus's hair,

"You staying the night? Lot of us are off to this pub up in Soho. It's safe enough."

" *Can* I stay, then? Just for a bit?"

"Don't see why not. Come on, you, let's get you fed." He hauled himself to his feet, looking thinner than ever in his spindly drainpipe jeans. He offered Remus a hand and pulled him up too.

Lunch was baked beans on toast – the bread was a bit mouldy, but they scraped off the greenest bits. Afterwards, they sat about in the living room with some of Grant's housemates and smoked pot with Bob Dylan playing in the background. Everything felt distinctly muggle-ish, and Remus was glad of it. It was so simple – no one knew him except Grant, who hardly knew him well. It could be very easy to disappear, if you wanted to, Remus thought to himself.

After a few deep drags on the spliff, Remus found himself lying on the slightly damp beige carpet, staring up at the tobacco stained ceiling. Grant gently placed a cushion under his head. He was being so kind, like an older brother – even though they were practically the same age and only a year ago had been all over each other. If Remus was being fully honest with himself, he had come prepared for more of the same, but was eternally grateful that Grant never so much as hinted in that direction.

"Fucking dog keeps barking," someone said in the background, bringing Remus slowly out of his dreamy state.

"What is it, a stray?" Someone else asked.

"Dunno. Bloody massive, though. Horrible black thing."

"Did you say there's a black dog outside?" Remus sat up, slowly, a sinking feeling in his belly. It couldn't be, surely.

"Yeah," Adz replied, standing at the window.

Remus stood up and went over to join him. Sure enough, there it was. He stepped back quickly behind the curtain, so Sirius wouldn't see him. How far could dogs see?

"I um... I need the loo, just a minute." Remus muttered, exiting the flat quickly. He hurried down the stairs and took the door out to the courtyard, where he stood at the threshold, watching the

huge black dog still barking up at the window.

"Hello, Sirius." He said, quietly. The dog turned and was quiet at once. "James with you?"

"Hiya, Moony," James stepped out from behind some bins, "Lovely place you've got here."

"Look, I'm not in the mood." Remus folded his arms. He felt a bit light headed from the dope.

"What do you want?"

Sirius had not transformed back, but sat there, watching him. Good. That made it easier for Remus to ignore him. He addressed James instead.

"What'd you mean 'what do we want'?" James raised an eyebrow, "We were worried about you! Your Matron called the muggle police and said you'd escaped, somehow Dumbledore found out and got in touch with my parents – I think they thought you'd come to ours. Sirius was sure you'd gone into London, he followed your scent practically all the way from the children's home."

"You were at St Edmund's?"

"Yeah."

Remus cringed at that, embarrassed. He had never wanted his friends to know what it was like where he lived. He sighed and held out his arms, as if presenting himself for inspection.

"Well, you've found me." He said. "As you can see, I'm perfectly fine. Now go away. And tell your dog to stop barking." He couldn't help slipping in a nasty barb at Sirius. His desire to hurt him had not gone away, apparently. Padfoot whined slightly and ducked his head. James ignored it, focussing on Remus,

"You're *not* perfectly fine. Never mind the fact that you appear to be hanging out in a muggle squat, *or* the fact that the muggle police are looking for you. We have to bring you back, right now. Dumbledore can only avoid telling the ministry you've gone walkabout for twenty four hours, he said. Then they'll set the Aurors on you."

"What?! Why??" But it suddenly dawned on Remus exactly why. He was not just a runaway teen, like Grant and his friends. He was a dangerous creature on the loose. He suddenly felt very, very tired. "Fuck's sake." He muttered, looking down.

"Come home with us, Remus." James extended a hand, "Dad said you can stay for the rest of the summer."

"I haven't forgiven him." Remus said, fiercely, looking at James because he could not look at Sirius. James looked as tired as Remus felt.

"I know, mate. It's ok, he gets it."

That made him angrier still, he didn't want Sirius to 'get' it. He wanted... well, he didn't know what he wanted – begging on his hands and knees? Padfoot was doing a good job of that as it was.

He sighed.

"Look, I've got a friend here, let me go and tell him I'm leaving."

Upstairs, he called for Grant from the hall. He didn't like to say a big goodbye in front of everyone.

"You alright, Remus mate?" Grant said from the top of the stairs, peering down at James and the

dog Sirius waiting in the hall.

“Yeah, fine. Look, I’m going to go... I have to go.”

“He a friend?” Grant eyed James suspiciously. “You going to be safe?”

“Yeah, he’s a friend from school. It’s fine. I can ring you, maybe?” He had no idea how he would contact a muggle squat from a wizarding household.

“You can come back any time.”

“Thanks. Seriously, Grant, thanks for everything. You’re... you’re amazing.”

“Don’t make me blush,” Grant wrapped his arms around his skinny body, looking down at his feet. “S’nuffin’ you wouldn’t do for me.”

“Right.” Remus nodded. Grant looked down the stairs again,

“That dog belong to him or something? Should be on a lead.”

“Yeah, probably,” Remus nodded, hoping Sirius could hear.

“Not dangerous, is it? Bloody hate dogs, me.”

“He’s pretty tame, don’t worry. I’ll be in touch, ok?” Remus bit his lip, glancing back through the open door into the crowded squat, “Will you be ok... here?”

Grant shrugged and grinned,

“Don’t worry about me, sweetheart. I always land on me feet.”

Remus stepped forward, putting a hand on Grant’s shoulder to push him gently backwards into the shadow of the stairwell, so that they could not be seen by James and Sirius, or through the doorway. He hugged him, tightly. Grant hugged him back, so beautifully. They pulled away, and shared a brief, friendly kiss, before both grinning shyly and stepping apart.

“What is it about you, eh?” Grant ruffled Remus’s hair, “Don’t stay away too long.”

“See you.” Remus nodded.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Perfect Day' by Lou Reed.

to 'knock over' - to burgle/rob from

Off Licence - convenience store in the UK which usually sells tobacco, newspapers, milk, alcohol etc.

'The tube' - The London Underground transport service

'Gammy' - Hurt/poorly functioning

Newsagent - Exactly the same as an Off Licence.

The Sexual Offences Act 1967 decriminalised 'male homosexuality' in the UK (only ten years before this fic is set), but the age of consent remained 21 until 1994, when it

was lowered to 18. It wasn't brought in line with the age of consent for heterosexual sex (16) until 2000.

Summer 1976: Part Two (The Potters')

Chapter Summary

CW for homophobic slur/internalised homophobia

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They caught the Knight Bus back to the Potter's. It was Remus's first experience of this bizarre wizard transport, but he was so fuzzy from lack of sleep and the remnants of the weed that he found himself dozing off in the comfortable purple armchair. Sirius stayed a dog for the duration, but Remus refused to give him any extra points for this.

James shook him awake once they arrived - it was late afternoon now. Remus stopped outside the front gate, and looked at James nervously,

"Will Dumbledore be there?"

"I think he's gone," James said, reassuringly, "Er... Moody might have stopped by, though..."

"For me?"

"Er... he's seeing dad... look, I didn't want to say anything on the bus, but it's been a bad summer, you know, for the war. We're losing."

"Losing?!"

"Yeah... let's talk about it inside - Padfoot." James clicked his fingers at the black dog. Instantly, Sirius transformed back into himself. Remus looked away at once. Still gorgeous, then. *You bastard, you bastard.*

Inside, Mrs Potter came running,

"Remus!" She reached her arms up to pull him into a hug,

"Euphemia!" A voice barked from the living room.

"Oh... for goodness sake." Mrs Potter muttered. She took a step back and looked Remus in the eye, "What did Monty and I give you for Christmas in 1973?"

"A chess set," Remus said, quickly, eyeing the doorway Moody's voice had come through.

"It's him!" Effie called, outstretching her arms once more and hugging him as tightly as their height difference would allow. "We were all so worried about you, dear!"

"I'm ok." Remus said, embarrassed.

"We thought you'd been... oh, well it doesn't bear thinking about. People going missing... dark marks... I really don't..." she looked very pale and washed out, as if she'd had a lot of bad news lately. Remus felt terrible for adding to her troubles. "Never mind," she said, briskly, smiling

again, “Something to eat? Or would you like a wash, first? Albus sent your things, they’re up in your usual room.”

“My... my things?!”

“From the Home, dear. Dumbledore sent them first thing this morning...”

Everything had happened so quickly. Was that really necessary? Moody appeared from the living room. He looked Remus up and down with one eye – the other, he appeared to have injured recently; it was covered by a thick leather patch. The effect made him look even more grizzled and terrifying than ever.

“Lupin.” He nodded, “A word.”

“No, Alastor,” Mrs Potter seemed to have surprised everyone, when she turned and placed herself between Remus and Moody, “He’s only just arrived, and look at him – he’s clearly exhausted. This can wait until tomorrow.”

“Effie, this is a matter of ministry--”

“Oh I don’t give a toss,” she tutted, shutting him up with a wag of her finger, “He’s only sixteen, he’s not of age, and he’s in my care. Remus,” she turned around, her voice kind again, “You just pop upstairs, eh? I’ll have Gully send some food up, but don’t you come down until you’re quite ready.”

Remus blinked in amazement. Could it be that an adult actually wanted to leave him alone? That had to be a first. He had a new respect for Euphemia Potter.

“Thanks,” he murmured, avoiding Moody’s fierce gaze and edging past them, ignoring James and Sirius, heading straight for the stairs, climbing them as fast as his clunky hip would allow.

All of his things had been neatly tidied away into drawers and cupboards in his bedroom; as if he lived there. He wondered what it would be like, having a place like this to call home - a place with a private bedroom, and a house elf, and a mother. He took his wand out of his trunk and held it for a little while, just to feel it.

What a day. Remus felt terrible about leaving Grant, after he had been so hospitable with the little he’d had. There were three empty bedrooms in the Potter’s house. Grant would be sharing a mattress on the floor tonight.

He sat on the bed and wished it wasn’t so comfortable. He could easily sleep again, but he was hungry too, and didn’t want to miss Gully. As if by magic, there was a soft knock at the door.

“Come in,”

James poked his head around,

“Hiya... I offered to bring the tray up, hope you don’t mind?”

Remus made a helpless gesture. James looked awkward, “Can I come in?”

“Ok.”

“Can... can Padfoot?”

“No.”

“Ok.”

James disappeared, and Remus heard him whisper, ‘*Give him a bit of time, eh?*’ before reappearing and entering the room with a tray piled high with what looked like ham sandwiches.

“Mum suggested soup,” he explained, setting in down on the bed, “But I said you’d want something meaty.”

“Cheers,” Remus nodded, grabbing one of the rolls and stuffing it into his mouth. At least then he didn’t have to talk.

“How’re you feeling?” James asked, his eyes full of concern.

Remus nodded, mouth full, to indicate that he felt perfectly fine. James nodded back. *This is how it will be*, Remus thought, glumly, *without Sirius to translate between us*.

James and Remus were very good friends - best friends. They had been alone together before; had private conversations, and shared confidences. But somehow it wasn’t the same. Sirius had always been the common denominator, who understood them both - bridging the gap, in a way.

“Look,” James said, “Tell me to piss off, if you want, and I’ll let you rest, but... I need to tell you something, it’s important.”

“Is it about Moody?” Remus asked, swallowing.

“Yeah.” James said, “Yeah... he’ll want to tell you, but Dad and I thought that it should come from a friend, first.”

“He’s here on ministry business, it sounds like,” Remus said, carefully, wanting to understand everything so James didn’t need to explain it, “He’s an auror, so... has there been an attack?”

“Yes,” James looked like he was struggling to maintain eye contact, but he was brave, and he did what needed to be done. “Actually there have been a few, this summer. And some people going missing – people on our side. Then... there was another attack, last night, Remus.” He put emphasis on this. Last night. The full moon.

“A werewolf.” Remus breathed.

James nodded, his mouth a grim, straight line. Remus put down the sandwich. His stomach growled in protest, but that was just the wolf, wanting more than it deserved, as usual. It would have to starve.

“I was at St Edmund’s,” Remus said, desperately, “The whole time, locked up - Madam Pomfrey saw me, I can’t have got out, look--” He raised his shirt hurriedly, to show James the long raw gashes across his ribs.

James winced and looked away. Remus remembered that James had rarely ever seen his scars. It was Sirius, who had always been so fascinated.

“I know,” James said, once Remus had replaced his shirt, “And mum and dad know - Dumbledore explained everything, he told Moody there was no way you had anything to do with anything. But he’ll want to talk to you, anyway.”

“Did... the attack, did anyone get hurt?”

“Yeah. A few deaths. Some muggles, and a wizard family.”

“Shit.”

“Are you ok?”

“I honestly don’t have an answer for you, Prongs.”

“Right. Sorry.”

“How’s your summer been?” Remus asked, desperate to put off any more bad news. “Good?”

“Yeah, not bad. Well, the war’s been... but y’know, loads of flying. Mary was here for a bit, too, to see Sirius--” James stopped short, “Sorry.”

“How is Mary?”

“Oh, fine. You know Mary. He um... he sent her home this morning, after we heard you were missing. It was his idea to go looking for you, he did nearly everything - even shouted at Dumbledore, I couldn’t believe it.”

“Ok.” Remus said, coldly. James frowned,

“Moony, he’s *so* sorry.”

“I’ve heard.”

“He was a mess, when he heard you were missing, and about the attacks - he thought all sorts of crazy things - that you’d been kidnapped, or targeted or something. Can’t you... can’t you at least talk to him? He’s miserable.”

“I don’t care how he feels.” Remus lied. “I don’t want to talk to him.”

“He’s an idiot,” James said, “I’m the first to admit it. He doesn’t bloody think, he just does whatever comes into his head. But... well you have to remember, his family - the way they treated him, the stuff at Christmas--”

“I *know* what happened at Christmas.” Remus snapped. “I was there too, James.”

“Yeah, I know, but--”

“And I felt sorry for him then, I really did. I felt sorry for him when we were kids, and every time they hurt him, and when they kicked him out; I’ve spent a lot of time feeling *so* sorry for him. But this... this.” He stopped. Tears would ruin everything. No tears.

James was very quiet.

“I’ll let you rest.” He said, finally, getting up to leave.

* * *

Thursday 12th August 1976

Remus didn’t leave the room for the rest of the afternoon, except once to use the bathroom. It was no better than St Edmund’s, he thought, self-pityingly. Better food, obviously, and magic, and quiet, but... well, he still spent all his time trying to avoid everybody, didn’t he?

Moody was still in the house, he could smell him. Moody had a strange scent, a combination of very strong, powerful magic, heavy and metallic like iron, plus something else - coal embers, or charred wood. He would not leave until he spoke with Remus, so Remus stayed put.

Sirius's scent was all too familiar - stronger in the house, now he called it home, permeating every room. *He* hadn't been moping by himself all summer - no matter what James said, Sirius had the Potters, and Mary, and his best friend, all telling him how *wonderful* and *hard done by* he was. Poor little rich boy. Probably hadn't missed Remus at all.

Except... James *had* said...

No. Remus stiffened his resolve. Sirius had to pay, even if it was only in Remus's silence.

The next day, he went down for breakfast, more out of politeness towards his hosts than anything else. He tried his best to smile at James's mother, and thank her as she served him a bowl of porridge, but scowled when Sirius pushed the jar of honey towards him. He ignored it, and for the first time in his life ate his porridge unsweetened. It tasted crap.

"We'll go to Diagon Alley today, I think," Mrs Potter said, as the kettle boiled. "Your letters arrived this morning. Remus... I'm very sorry, but you'll have to stay here, dear. I'll pick up your bits."

"I get my books second hand," Remus said, flushing, "From the supply at Hogwarts. I've got no money."

"Oh. Well, I don't mind, I'm already sorting it for James and Sirius."

"I'm paying you back!" Sirius jumped in, eagerly, "As soon as I'm seventeen, I promise."

"I know, dear," Mrs Potter patted Sirius's arm fondly.

"I can't pay you back." Remus said, talking to Mrs Potter, but glaring at Sirius, gritting his teeth. "Even when I'm seventeen. *I* haven't got an inheritance."

Sirius lowered his eyes, crestfallen.

"Why can't Remus come, mum?" James jumped in, quickly. "He's never been before."

"I'm afraid it's not very safe, love," Mrs Potter sighed, "Dumbledore and Moody both agree... after the attack."

Remus dropped his head into his hands. He saw his life unravelling before his eyes - it would always be this way. Places he couldn't go, things he couldn't afford, friends he couldn't speak to. *When the war's over, you'll still be a queer werewolf with a chip on your shoulder*. That nasty voice returned.

"Wait," James said, suddenly, "Our letters arrived?!"

Remus looked up, confused. Mrs Potter was smiling mischievously, her eyes twinkling,

"My goodness," she said, pulling three thick envelopes from her pinafore, "If it took you that long to cotton on, then I'm very concerned about your OWL results..." She handed each of the boys their letters, and they tore them open.

Remus stared at the list of letters on the parchment. Weirdly, the thing that startled him most was

his 'Acceptable' for Potions. That was definitely Lily Evans' doing. History of Magic; Outstanding, Care of Magical Creatures; Outstanding, Charms; Outstanding... and the rest; Exceeds Expectations. A flutter of excitement started up in his midriff. These were bloody good results.

"Yes, Moony, you beauty!" James cheered, reading over his shoulder.

"H-how did you do?" Remus asked, bashfully. James handed over his paper - he'd got almost entirely Exceeds Expectations, and two Outstandings - one in Defence Against the Dark Arts and the other in Transfiguration.

"Go and show you father!" Mrs Potter said, after kissing her son gleefully. Mr Potter had not yet left his study, as far as Remus could tell. James took him a plate of toast, too.

Sirius was looking at Remus across the table, biting his lip.

"You did well, then?" He asked, tentatively. Remus nodded curtly,

"I'm pretty happy, yeah." He desperately wanted to know how Sirius had done - mostly to find out if he'd done better in History of Magic. Luckily, he didn't need to ask. Sirius slid his parchment across the table. Remus craned his neck to look at it.

They had achieved exactly the same number of OWLs, in different subjects. Sirius's 'Outstanding' grades had come in Transfiguration, Defence Against the Dark Arts and - incredibly - Muggle Studies. Remus tried not to smile at this. Instead he glanced up at Sirius coolly and said,

"I beat you in History."

* * *

Mrs Potter and the boys left shortly after breakfast, and Remus was alone. He went outside, into the garden and sat on the edge of the low patio wall, staring out at their acres of green open land. He pulled out his fags. Only three left. He could maybe go into town later and buy some - he had a bit of shrapnel in his back pocket. Too tall to steal, these days.

"Lupin."

Remus hoped his shoulders hadn't stiffened too visibly at the sound of that gruff voice. He turned, slowly,

"All right, Moody?" He was glad to have the cigarette. Something to hide behind.

"May I join you?"

Remus shrugged. Moody sat down on the wall beside him. "Lovely day."

"Yeah, t'riflic..."

"No doubt the Potter boy's spilled the beans on the werewolf attack?"

Remus nodded, appreciating Alastor's bluntness. *Let's get this over with.*

"Yep." He exhaled, slowly, making a smoke ring. "What'd you want to ask me? You know I was locked up."

"I've spoken with Albus and Poppy, they both confirmed your whereabouts."

“Yippee.” Remus said, sarcastically. Moody gave him a stern look with his still functioning eye.

“We have suspects, though. One in particular, someone you might have heard of.”

Remus went cold, his hands began to shake. He pretended he was just flicking ash.

“Greyback?” He asked, his voice colourless.

“Greyback.” Moody confirmed. Remus stubbed out the cigarette and gripped the wall with both hands, as if he might fall.

“I didn’t know he was... I hadn’t heard of him attacking anyone in a long time. I thought he was abroad, somewhere.”

“Been doing your research, have you?” Moody said, a note of challenge in his voice, “Can’t say I blame you, lad. I’d want to know everything I could. He’s not tried to contact you, then?”

“No!” Remus was shocked. Why on earth?!

“If you’ve done your research properly – and Dumbledore says you’re clever – then you’ll know Greyback has a particular penchant for children?”

“Mm.” Remus had to stop himself from touching the ancient scar on his side, those eleven year old teeth marks.

“Never wondered why?”

“He’s a monster.” Remus said, firmly. He fumbled with his cigarette packet – he needed another one, to keep steady. What he wouldn’t give for a spliff.

“He is,” Moody agreed, “But he’s got a motive, mad as it seems. We’ve reason to believe that he likes to turn kids young, so he can show up when they’re old enough – and strong enough – to join him.”

“Join him?!”

“In his mind, he’s your father.” Moody said, as if it was nothing, “He’ll want you to... take up the family trade, as it were.”

“That’s disgusting.” Remus stood up, practically shouting.

“It is.” Moody replied, unperturbed. “But you need to be aware. Greyback hasn’t been seen in Britain since the last person he turned.” Here, he gave Remus a very pointed look. “But a wizarding family was killed last night – all except their youngest child, who was bitten, but survived. A dark mark had been cast above the house.”

He was definitely working with Voldemort, then. Just brilliant.

“Is this why I can’t go to Diagon Alley?”

“It’s best if you stay away from wizard populated areas for a while. ‘Til we catch him.”

“Hogwarts?”

“Hogwarts is safe,” Moody said, “But not Hogsmeade. I’m asking Dumbledore to keep you away.”

“Oh. Ok.”

“And no more running away.”

“That wasn’t... that was about something else.” Remus sighed. Then he thought of something.

“What happened to the kid? The one that was bitten?” He raised his cigarette to his lips and sucked – but realised he hadn’t lit it. Moody snapped his fingers, and it ignited immediately.

“At St. Mungo’s.” The auror said. “Being treated. They’ll be fine.”

“Oh, will they?” Remus could have laughed. He looked out across the fields again. It was such a beautiful day. “Until the next moon, I s’pose.”

“The right people got there in time. We’ll do what we can.”

The right people. Remus wondered whether the ‘right people’ had been responsible for his being carted off to St Edmund’s. “We have a mutual friend.” Moody said, out of the blue.

“Hm?” Remus frowned at him.

“Leo Ferox. Good man.”

“Oh, right – how do you know him?”

“We were at school together. Cross paths at work, sometimes - and of course working with Dumbledore. I hear you and your pals are planning to join up yourselves, that right?”

Remus had the impression that Moody knew the answer to this, and just wanted Remus to confirm it himself.

“Yes.” He nodded. “I know I’m not James, or... but I’m not bad at duelling, and if I can help, I want to.”

“If you’re anything like your father you’ll be more than a help.”

Remus nodded, glumly. How was he supposed to know whether he was anything like his father? What a stupid thing to say.

“Dunno about that.” He said, bitterly, “I have a few limitations my father didn’t have.”

“Could look at it that way,” Moody tilted his head. “Could look at it another way. How many werewolves do you think we’ve got on our side?”

Remus frowned, as if Moody had sworn at him. Is that why Dumbledore kept him so close? Is that why he hadn’t alerted the ministry as soon as Remus was reported missing? He didn’t know if that was better or worse. At least someone thought he was useful.

Chapter End Notes

'Shrapnel' is common UK slang for loose change.

Summer 1976 (part three: Peace Talks)

It wasn't easy for Remus to keep Sirius at a distance while he was staying with the Potters. The house was big enough, but that didn't matter much in a family home; something Remus was only just learning. Mrs Potter gave Remus his space during the first couple of days, but after that it was clear that she had no idea of the rift between the marauders, and expected the three boys to spend all of their time together as usual.

As much as they were each uncomfortable with this arrangement, for their own reasons, none of them wanted to disappoint or worry Euphemia. So an uneasy truce was struck, and Remus spent most of his time reading his book, sitting close enough to James and Sirius that it did not look suspicious.

Grant had said that it wouldn't always hurt - and though he hadn't had the full facts of the situation, Remus was starting to believe him. He still felt very angry towards Sirius - but it hurt less, as the final weeks of summer drained away in a flood of sunshine and blue skies. He was able, at least, to be civil, and Sirius seemed grateful. At any rate, he had stopped trying to corner Remus into a conversation every five minutes.

Besides, after his conversation with Moody, Remus had other things occupying his mind. For years now, he had been labouring under the assumption that Greyback did not know him, that he would have the element of surprise in his corner. But now it seemed that Greyback might be looking for him, too. He would not tell the marauders this, not until he knew more. No use getting them worried; if Moody said that Hogwarts was safe, then Remus was inclined to believe him for now. The Potters clearly trusted him, and that would have to be enough. What was more; he knew Ferox.

Remus had had Ferox on his mind too. Once again, his old professor seemed like the safest option when it came to asking questions. He understood Remus's need to know more - even if he didn't know *why*, exactly. And Remus didn't want to bother Mr Potter, not when he seemed to have the weight of the world on his shoulders already. He would send an owl to Ferox as soon as he was back at school - and as soon as the dust had settled on this recent revelation.

In the meantime, Peter came over every day, and they went out on their brooms, or else lounged about on the lawn, smoking, listening to Sirius's record player and sunbathing. Remus turned a warm hazelnut brown all over, which made him look healthier than he ever had, and his hair bleached a shade fairer.

On the penultimate day of the holidays, they were doing just this - it was too hot to move, and all four of them were lying on their backs baking in the sun. Remus had positioned himself a little further away from the others, just to show Sirius that he was not off the hook. (Also because Sirius had an annoying habit of taking his shirt off, and Remus was trying not to notice.)

"So tell me again," Peter yawned up at the sun, arms behind his head, "What was the Knight Bus like? I've always wanted to go on it."

"Dream big, Petey." Sirius drawled.

"It wasn't that great," James replied, "Can't wait until we can all apparate - lessons start in January."

"I'm going to be rubbish at it." Peter said, forlorn, "Dezzie has been reading the theory books, I can't get my head around it."

“Well it's better than relying on that stupid bus.” James removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes, “It’s fine for magical locations, but the driver kept getting lost on the way to St Edmund’s.”

Remus’s stomach flipped. He really, really hated the idea that James and Sirius had been there. He felt as though they’d seen some private part of him he would have preferred to keep hidden. Like the first time he’d transformed in front of them.

“I can’t believe I missed that too.” Peter sighed. “Were there loads of muggles? What was it like?”

“C’mon Pete,” James said, “That’s Moony’s home you’re talking about.”

“It’s fine.” Remus said.

“I bet it's great, living with loads of other people your age,” James said, encouragingly. It was James’s greatest sorrow that he had grown up an only child.

“It’s...” Remus looked for the right word. “It’s noisy. Did you go inside?”

“Padfoot did, crawled under a hole in the back fence.”

“Didn’t go in the building, though.” Sirius said, rolling onto his front. The muscles in his back moved smoothly under his skin and Remus had to fight not to bite his lip. “Some bitch started throwing stones at me.”

“Matron.” Remus confirmed.

“Must’ve been.” Sirius nodded, obviously pleased at the attention, “If she treats people the way she treats dogs then I don’t blame you for running away.”

“It wasn't really about her.” Remus said, pointedly.

“It’s lucky Prongs and Padfoot found you though, eh Moony?” Peter smiled, blissfully ignorant, “Otherwise you’d be lost in muggle London!”

“I wasn’t lost.” Remus said, icily, putting his book down finally. “I was with a friend.”

“But James said--”

“I said he was in a squat, Pete, not alone. He was with this muggle chap - sorry Remus, I’ve forgotten his name..?”

“He didn't tell us his name.” Sirius said, out of nowhere. Remus sat up and squinted at him. Sirius was staring at him in a strange way, but it only brought Remus’s hackles up.

“No.” He replied, “I didn't.” He got to his feet. “I’m going in, it's too hot.”

James, who seemed to have grasped that the conversation had taken an unpleasant turn, got up too.

“Yeah, you’re right Moony. Shall we all go in for a bit? Have a drink and do that washing up mum wanted sorting. She’ll be back soon.”

Mrs Potter had left for the afternoon on an errand, and Mr Potter was at work. Gully was in the house somewhere, of course, but he never made his presence known unless summoned. The boys were pretty much alone.

“I’ll go home if you’re going to do *chores*,” Peter grumbled, struggling to his own feet, “I can do

housework at mine.”

“Cheer up Wormy,” James slapped him on his sweaty shoulder, “There’re jam tarts in the kitchen, you can have the marmalade one if you want.”

The four of them strolled back across the crisp brittle lawn to the house, stopping at the shed so that Sirius and James could put their brooms away first. Pete went straight in for his tart, and Remus hung back on the patio, between them all, feeling very put out and agitated. He sat on the low brick wall again and listened to Sirius and James’s cheerful banter from inside the shed.

“I ought to polish the handle again before I pack it away...”

“Bloody hell Prongs, you polish it twice a day already.”

“It’s called looking after your equipment, Black.”

“I call it sexual frustration.”

“Piss off!”

There was a scuffle, and Remus could hear Sirius’s gleeful cackling as the two boys wrestled. “Wait ‘til we’re back at school and I can curse your bollocks off!” James laughed,

“Don’t you dare - *some* of us use our bollocks!”

“You tosser! I ought to - oh shit, watch out...”

“Ah!” Sirius cried, “Bugger! That hurt.”

They both staggered back out into the daylight, Sirius clutching his hand.

“What did you do?” James asked, peering over. He paled, upon seeing Sirius’s hand, and backed away, “Sorry mate, you know how I am with blood...”

“Eurgh, it’s really bleeding, too...”

“Oi, get away from me!”

“What shall I do? Wait ‘til your mum gets home?”

“No choice - I dunno any healing spells...”

“Ow, it bloody hurts...”

“Oh, for god’s sake,” Remus stood up, squinting. “Let me see.”

Sirius and James both turned to look at him. Sirius’s eyes flickered to James, then back to Remus, before he walked over, hand outstretched. The cut was very deep, blood running in rivulets down Sirius’s long white wrists.

Remus swallowed, “You need to clean that, it’ll get infected... hang on, I’ve got some stuff in my trunk.”

He led Sirius through the kitchen, upstairs to the first floor bathroom and turned on the cold tap. He had some TCP in his trunk leftover from St Edmund’s, where he often had to look after his own scrapes when Madam Pomfrey wasn’t around. He brought it through, along with some cotton balls

and gauze.

“Come here.” He said, sitting on the edge of the bathtub and motioning that Sirius sit on the closed toilet seat. He obeyed, still holding his hand out warily.

It was much cooler, in the bathroom, reassuringly sterile, like the hospital wing. Remus found that very calming. Sirius was placid and docile, trusting Remus completely with watchful eyes, like a pet.

“What's that?” He asked as Remus tipped some disinfectant onto the cotton.

“TCP.” He said, “It'll clean the wound.”

“Is it muggle stuff?”

“I'm sure it will work just the same,” Remus raised an eyebrow. He took Sirius's wrist, gripping it more roughly than he really needed to. His skin was hot from the sun. Remus could feel his pulse. “It's going to sting.” He said, as he pressed down. Sirius flinched, and Remus was reminded of the time after Christmas they'd spent in the Potter's bathroom, piercing Sirius's ear.

“Will it hurt??” Sirius panicked at the last minute, as Remus was poised with the pin.

“Well we've numbed it a bit, but yeah, probably.” Remus said, matter-of-factly. “Don't be such a girl.”

“Be gentle with me, Moony!”

They had both laughed, and Remus shook him fondly;

“Stay still you big wuss.”

He finished cleaning the wound and then wrapped it in gauze, taping it neatly.

“Probably throb a bit.” He explained. “Meant to be tight. Stops the bleeding.”

“Thanks, Moony.”

“Any time.” Remus went to get up, placing both hands on the cold porcelain of the tub. Sirius suddenly reached out and touched his arm.

“I'm sorry.”

“I know.” Remus replied. “You've said.”

“What I did...” Sirius licked his lips nervously, still grasping Remus's arm as if that was the only thing keeping him in place.

“Don't.” Remus frowned, his resolve weakening.

“But we ought to talk--”

“We can't.” Remus said, simply. “I can't, anyway. There are no words for what you did to me.”

“No.” Sirius hung his head. “You're right.” He let go, but Remus didn't walk away, though he knew he ought to. Sirius ran his uninjured hand through his hair in frustration. “I'm such an idiot.” He said.

Remus did not refute this. Sirius continued. "It was a really good year, wasn't it, fifth year? Spending the moons together, and the parties... then I went and ballsed it all up."

"Well." Remus relented. "I made some mistakes too. I made things... things were different, after my birthday."

"What? Moony, no!" Sirius's eyes widened. He looked so earnest and sincere that Remus wanted to forgive everything in an instant. "I know I wasn't... you didn't do anything wrong. That, what happened on your birthday, it was..."

Remus held his breath while Sirius searched for the word. "...it was really brave." Sirius finished.

Remus blinked. Brave?! What on earth was that supposed to mean? Sirius saw his reaction, and tried to cover his tracks,

"I just mean that you shouldn't worry about it. It didn't... *that* didn't change anything, ok?"

"Ok." Remus looked down, then – feeling braver, looked up again. "We never talked about that."

"You're my best friend, Remus."

"Sirius, please...."

"And I know what I did. There aren't words, no, so I'll shut up and I'll... I'll do actions, instead, ok? I'll prove I'm sorry, every day. I swear, I'll never do another stupid thing without thinking again."

Remus gave him a small smile,

"Come on."

Sirius smiled too, looking relieved.

"Yeah, ok, maybe a bit ambitious. I'll never do anything to hurt any one of my friends, ever again, how's that?"

Remus breathed in deeply. Forgiveness would be such a blessed relief.

"It's a start."

Sixth Year: September

Wednesday 1st September 1976

“This is the year, lads. This is the year it finally happens. Six years of waiting and it all pays off.”

“You can’t be talking about what I think you’re talking about,” Remus raised an eyebrow over to top of his book.

“Oh yes,” James was beaming like a drunkard, “Lily Evans is *definitely* going to realise she’s mad about me. I can feel it.”

“Are you sure, though?” Sirius smirked, “You’ve had these feelings before.”

“I have,” James nodded, respectfully, “You’re quite right, Padfoot. But something is different this time. I can practically taste it. Love is very much in the air.”

“Or lust,” Remus muttered, flipping his page over, “You’re probably just picking up on the raging hormones coming off these idiots.” He nodded at Sirius and Peter, who both kept glancing out of the train window, looking for their respective girlfriends.

“Who’re you calling an idiot, Moony?” Sirius retorted, “I can’t help it if I drive women wild with desire.”

“SIRIUS BLOODY BLACK, I COULD KILL YOU!” Mary’s furious shriek could have shattered glass. Sirius practically leapt two feet off his seat.

Remus gave a satisfied nod.

“Wild with something, anyway.”

James guffawed, nearly choking on the Bertie Botts every flavour bean he had been chewing.

No one was happier about Remus and Sirius’s reconciliation than James. He didn’t say anything directly, but as soon as he recognised that his two best friends were no longer keeping each other at arm’s length, he was grinning from ear to ear, back to his usual mischievous self. And therefore, back to sighing over Lily Evans.

Lily entered the carriage at this point, just behind Mary who had burst in like a whirlwind. Lily smiled at Remus and took the spare seat beside him, he smiled back and they settled in to watch the show.

“What have I done?!” Sirius asked, affronted.

“You really don’t know, do you?!” Mary stood with her hands on her hips, a look of disgust on her face. She looked spectacular when she was angry, her gold hoop earrings jangled, her kohl rimmed eyes were wide and fiery. “Diagon Alley?!” She stamped her foot.

Sirius’s eyes widened.

“Bugger.”

“Fuck you, Black!” Mary turned and stormed back out. Sirius scrambled up to follow her down the corridor, just as the train started moving,

“Oi, Mary, wait! I’m sorry..!”

Remus turned to Lily,

“What did he do?”

“Forgot her birthday,” Lily grinned, “Apparently they had a plan to meet in Diagon Alley and she waited for two hours...”

“Oh bollocks,” James slapped his forehead, “I was supposed to remind him...”

“You’re as bad as each other,” Lily snorted. “Godric save the girls stupid enough to marry any of you.”

“Has anyone seen Desdemona?” Peter asked, distractedly. Lily shook her head and the boys shrugged. Peter got up, “I’ll see you lot later...” and wandered out of the carriage.

“Bloody hell,” James said, “What’s happened to the marauders?”

“Oi, I’m here,” Remus said, returning to his book.

“My only true friend!” James smiled, “You’ll never leave me for a girl, will you, Moony?”

“No chance,” Remus replied, turning the page again.

“Wait,” Lily yelped, grabbing Remus’s shoulder, “*That’s* why they call you Moony?!”

Remus gave her a sideways grin and nodded very slightly. Lily looked amazed,

“I can’t believe I didn’t work it out sooner!”

“Hang on,” James frowned, “Worked what out? It’s just an in joke, right, Remus? Some stupid thing we came up with as kids, no big secret or any-”

“Prongs,” Remus shook his head, laughing, “It’s fine; she knows.”

James’ hazel eyes widened, and he stared at them both. Lily giggled, her eyes teasing and Remus suddenly saw exactly why she drove James so crazy.

“You’re an idiot, Potter. But at least you can keep a secret.”

“Well, of course,” James straightened his back and puffed out his chest, “We’d all do anything for Moony.”

Remus was really quite touched by that, and had to raise his book to hide his face. He hoped Lily knew that James was being quite honest, and not just showing off for her approval. The compartment door slid open and Marlene entered. She’d had her hair cut into a neat bob over the summer, like Mia Farrow. It was very becoming. She smiled and nodded at her friends, sitting down next to James.

“Sirius and Mary are having a proper screaming match out there, it’s mental.” She looked at Lily, then James, then Remus, “What have I missed?”

* * *

Mary forgave Sirius by the time they reached Hogwarts, on the promise that he would take her for

a day in Hogsmeade to make up for it. Remus was pleased - he could honestly, truly say that, without bitterness. He felt that Sirius had drawn a line under their kiss, back in the Potter's bathroom, and it was up to him, Remus, to honour and respect that line.

Sirius liked Mary. Remus would just have to get over it, that's all. And yes, fine, sometimes Remus fantasised about kissing the hollow of Sirius's collar bone, about tracing a line from the pit of his throat down to his naval - so what?! That was purely Remus's problem. He'd have to focus his attentions elsewhere. Perhaps Christopher had become dazzlingly attractive over the summer.

The feast and the sorting was as magnificent and reassuringly predictable as ever. The friends chatted about their new timetables (Lily was extremely disappointed to find out that Remus had chosen to drop Potions, but he promised to keep giving her a run for her money in Charms), their summers

(tactfully avoiding Mary's birthday) and the looming pressure of NEWTs. All blissfully normal, Remus thought to himself as they finished their puddings and got up, yawning, ready for bed.

"I'm knackered," James said, stretching, "Early night tonight, eh, Marlene? Practice first thing--"

"Oh no you don't, Potter, you're coming with me." Lily said, sternly. He blinked, as if he couldn't believe his luck. She frowned, "We've got to lead the first years to bed - have you *already* forgotten you're a prefect?!"

"Oh shit, yeah -- I mean bugger-- I mean... whoops."

Lily tutted, getting up,

"We'll work on your language, too. Come on." She looked at the others, "Password's 'lion heart'."

They thanked her, and went on ahead, leaving James behind, looking confused but grateful.

Sirius flung himself into the largest, comfiest couch in the common room, taking up enough space for three people. Mary joined him with an indulgent smile, settling her little feet across his legs. Peter and Marlene started a game of chess on the carpet in front of the fire, and Remus picked up his book. *Everything as it should be*, he smiled peacefully.

A chapter in, Sirius evidently grew bored.

"When's our first party, then?" He asked the general room.

"Our first match is in November," Marlene said from the floor, her eyes on the game. You couldn't look away for a moment when you were playing Peter - no one knew how he did it. "You can organise the victory party if you want, Black."

"That's aaages away." Mary purred, "Halloween? Close to your birthday. We can do it after the feast."

Remus's stomach rumbled at the mention of a feast. He put down his book,

"Wonder if there's time to go down to the kitchens..."

"You can't possibly be hungry," Sirius arched an eyebrow, "You had three helpings of pudding!"

"You're probably right." Remus sighed and settled back into the armchair. He shifted sideways, dangling his long legs over the end, kicking off his dirty tennis shoes, and returned to his book. It

was Dickens – *The Pickwick Papers* – and funny, but dry, so that you had to really focus in order to actually find the funny bits. Unfortunately, a full stomach, a long day and a warm fireplace were not conducive to concentration, and Remus soon dozed off.

It must have been only half an hour that had passed, when Remus snapped awake at the sound of raucous laughter.

“Stay *still* Potter!”

“I’m trying!”

Remus blinked a few times, confused and groggy. He stared around to find Peter and Marlene rolling on the hearth rug giggling, Mary standing next to Lily near the portrait hole, where James appeared to be performing a very complicated and vigorous Irish jig. Remus smiled sleepily, and straightened up, his back sore from sleeping all folded up like a deck chair. He turned left, just to get the gristle in his neck to pop, and caught Sirius watching him with a soft, unconscious smile. Remus raised an eyebrow, which seemed to break the spell, and Sirius blinked, then looked away, quickly.

“What happened?” Mary was asking, with hands on her hips,

“Silly prat was showing off, as per usual. His hex hit a suit of armour and backfired.” Lily was half laughing, half trying to corner James for long enough to perform the counter jinx.

“Who were you trying to hex?!” Sirius stood up now, crossing the room.

“Bloody Mulciber,” James said, a comical frown on his face as his legs flew about energetically beneath him,

“*Petrificus Totalus*,” Sirius said, with a yawn. James froze still, and fell to the ground as stiff as a board.

“Black!” Lily sighed

“What?!” Sirius grinned, “I was only trying to help!”

Remus giggled, still stretching. It was probably time for bed. He got up slowly, as Sirius, Mary and Lily stood over James, arguing over which spell to break first - the dancing one or the petrifying one - and Sirius was in favour of simply levitating him up to bed as he was.

Just as Remus was heading in the direction of the boys dormitory, he caught sight of Christopher. The fifth year boy was coming down the stairs, with a shiny silver prefects badge pinned proudly to his chest. Unfortunately, Christopher had *not* become incredibly good looking over the summer - in fact, quite the opposite. He had obviously been somewhere very hot and sunny over the summer, and his pale English skin was scorched bright red and peeling grotesquely at his nose.

They stared at each other for a moment, before Christopher looked at his feet, then walked away without a word. Remus felt the sting of guilt. He’d have to apologise, at some point.

* * *

Wednesday 8 th September 1976

“With your OWLs now behind you, and your NEWTs over a year away, *do not* fall into the trap of believing that this will be an easy year. Your sixth year lays the foundation for your advanced

exams, and the work you do will be pivotal in determining the opportunities available to you once you leave school...”

Remus fought not to yawn. He might have felt nervous, worried, spurred into action – and he had been. The first time he’d heard this speech. They were halfway through their first week of sixth year, and so far every teacher had performed some variation on this address. This morning, the lecture was being given by Professor Flitwick, and therefore made mildly more interesting because of his squeaky little voice.

Remus looked out of the window. It was the full moon tonight, and he was restless. He had a horrible feeling about it, as well as the usual early twinges and surges of adrenaline. It was the first full moon he would be spending with the marauders since that terrible night in June. It was the first full moon after the werewolf attack in August – since he had run away from St Edmund’s.

The murders played heavy on his mind. The family was called Munday – both parents had been muggle born. It had been in the papers, and Remus had read everything he could while he was at the Potters. He’d searched high and low for mention of Greyback, for a picture, a description – *anything*. If this... man was after him, then he needed to be armed with information. But there was nothing. The press wasn’t publishing anything more than Moody had already told him.

The letter to Ferox had been written for almost a week now. It was burning a hole in Remus’s back pocket. He’d been waiting to get a chance to sneak off to the owlery on his own.

Dear Professor Ferox,

[he knew that Ferox wasn’t a professor any more, but he didn’t know what else to call him, and couldn’t bring himself to address him as anything so familiar as ‘Leo’.]

I hope it’s ok for me to write to you. I had a few questions and I couldn’t think of anyone else who might know. I spoke to Alastor Moody while I was staying with the Potters this summer, and he said you’re well. I hope you aren’t anywhere too dangerous.

Moody told me that the Munday family were murdered by Greyback. He said that Greyback might try to find me, and get me to join him. I hope you know I would never join that side. I do want to be prepared if he comes after me, though. Can you tell me anything useful? I don’t even know what he looks like.

I’m sorry to bother you with this, but you are the only person I can ask, because you knew my dad, and you know me.

Thank you,

Remus J. Lupin.

He knew that you were supposed to end letters ‘yours sincerely’ or ‘yours faithfully’, or something like that, but it seemed so silly and formal. He worried that Ferox might think he was trying too hard to seem grown up.

“Moony? Wakey wakey!” Sirius shook his shoulder.

“What?!” Remus looked up, blinking and dazed. Sirius was standing over him, and everyone else was packing up their things,

“Lesson’s over, dopey. Where did you wander off to?”

“Just distracted,” Remus replied. He stood up and scooped his own assortment of quills and parchment into his book bag, getting up.

Sirius’s face softened. He leaned in and said very low,

“Is it because of tonight? Are you nervous?”

Remus gave a sort of half shrug, half reassuring smile,

“No more than usual.”

“We’ve got a free now,” Sirius said, chirpily - he was very much enjoying his NEWT timetable, having dropped four subjects. “Want to pop round the greenhouses?”

“Nah,” Remus grinned, “S’ok. I actually... I have to go to the owlery. Got a letter to post.”

“Oh yeah? I’ll come with you, James has *another* poncey prefect meeting. I swear you never went to this many meetings,”

“Nah, I sort of left it all up to Evans, to be honest,” Remus smirked, “Of course, *I* wasn’t trying to impress her.”

Sirius laughed,

“Too bloody right - at least *you* know where your priorities are, Moony. Who’s the letter for?”

“Er... do you mind not asking?” Remus looked down, as they left the classroom, walking with a slightly longer stride than usual so that Sirius would have to walk faster to keep up. It was a cheap trick, but there had to be some benefits to being tall.

“Oh, of course, mate.” Sirius nodded respectfully, “Don’t mind me, I’m just bored, y’know.”

He had been extremely pliant lately, eager to supply Remus with any allowances he requested. Remus thought he could probably get away with snogging Mary on the Gryffindor dinner table with Sirius’s blessing, the way things were.

They tramped up to the owlery quickly - with the moon waxing Remus’s energy levels were through the roof - then going single file up the final narrow winding staircase.

The owlery was a beautiful place, by anyone’s standards (provided you ignored the smell of bird shit) with the very best view of anywhere else in the castle. It was a bright and airy space with high rafters, filled with the soft sounds of roosting owls. Sirius dutifully hung back a respectable distance as Remus selected the sturdiest looking owl (he had no idea where Ferox was, or how far away, and wanted a bird that was up to the job), attached his letter, and released it through the huge picture window.

Sirius was leaning out of the window on the opposite side, staring down at the forbidden forest.

“How far d’you reckon we got, last year?” He asked, “Couple of miles, at least...”

“At least,” Remus agreed, joining him at the windowsill.

“Think we could reach those mountains? There’re caves, I bet. I used to quite fancy living in a cave, when I was little. Me and Reggie were going to run away from home and become cave dwellers.”

“Weirdo,” Remus shook his head. “It’d be freezing.”

“Yeah, well you don’t think about that stuff when you’re seven, do you?”

“I s’pose. I never actually thought about running away, to be honest. Lots of boys actually did it, but the police normally brought them back. Matron used to say that if one of us went missing it was no skin off her nose - she still got paid, at the end of the week.”

“Moony, that’s...”

Remus laughed, and moved away,

“C’mon, let’s get out of here, I’m hungry.”

They began a slightly slower descent down the spiral staircase, but had to stop halfway as they heard footsteps coming up. Remus’s stomach sank when he saw it was Christopher. He’d recovered a bit from his sunburn, but still had a bit of a hot glow around his cheeks and nose. He froze when he saw Sirius, with Remus just behind him.

The two boys flattened themselves against the wall as best they could to let him past.

“Hi, Chris,” Remus smiled, politely.

“Hi.” Christopher responded, not making eye contact. Ah. He was definitely still annoyed about the way Remus had spoken to him at the end of last term. Remus had been worried about that - but he supposed he deserved a bit of cold shoulder. The silver pin gleamed on Chris’s robes, and Remus tried not to wince. He could feel it in his teeth, a giddy, sick sensation.

“Well done on getting prefect,” he said, trying to sound friendly and encouraging.

“Yeah... thanks.” Christopher nodded. he still didn’t look up, exactly, but he sort of looked at the space over Remus’s left shoulder, and gave a weak smile as he passed.

The close proximity to the silver was extremely unpleasant, and Remus’s head swam, making him dizzy. As Christopher pushed past them both, Remus wobbled forward and had to grip Sirius’s shoulder to keep balanced. He had to concentrate on his breathing to avoid fainting altogether until Christopher had reached the owlery, and barely noticed that Sirius had slipped a strong arm around his back for support.

When he opened his eyes, and the wooziness had passed, Remus thought it must only have been a few seconds that they had stood like that, clinging to each other in the shadowy stairway. (*Must stop getting stuck in confined spaces with him*, the logical part of Remus’s brain scolded.) He realised he had been gripping Sirius’s shoulder really quite hard, and let go quickly, stepping away and adjusting his robes.

“Sorry,” he said, “Took me by surprise,”

“S’ok,” Sirius smiled, turning and walking down the stairs again, “Another reason to hate prefects, eh?”

Sixth Year: October

Saturday 9th October 1976

“Ugh,” Remus staggered to his feet as the transformation completed and his body settled back into its human form.

“That didn't seem too bad?” James said, having just transformed himself.

“Depends what you mean by bad,” Remus grimaced, pulling his trousers on quickly.

James looked away, politely to preserve his modesty, and Sirius, still a dog, padded over with Remus's shirt in his mouth, offering it up with a cocked head. “Cheers, Padfoot,” Remus smiled. He wanted to pat the dog on the head, and had to keep reminding himself that this was Sirius.

“Thank merlin it's Saturday,” James yawned, taking a seat on the beaten-up couch. It sagged drearily beneath him, springs wheezing.

“Yeah, if Madam Pomfrey lets me off the hospital wing, I'll probably go straight to bed anyway,” Remus replied, stifling his own yawn, and laying down on his cot.

“You're lucky,” Peter said, appearing as if from nowhere, in a far corner of the room, “S'posed to be taking Dezzie to Hogsmeade at eleven. Prongs, don't you have to lead the third years down?”

“Nah,” James yawned again, noisily, “Now Evans knows about Remus's furry little problem she's actually cutting me some slack. That fifth year kid with the sunburn is doing it instead.”

“Evans doesn't know anything else, does she?” Sirius finally reappeared, joining James on the couch.

James shook his head, leaning back on the couch and closing his eyes. “Oi,” Sirius nudged him, “We've got to go, soon, don't sleep.”

“You lot go,” Remus murmured, “Get some rest. Thanks for coming, and all that...”

“Coming to Hogsmeade, Moony?” Sirius asked, hauling James to his feet, “Three Broomsticks?”

“Can't,” Remus shook his head, “Didn't I tell you? Had my permission revoked. After the attacks...”

“What?!” Sirius looked outraged, “They can't punish YOU for something some other bastard's done!”

“Shhh!” Remus flapped his hand, frowning. Madam Pomfrey could be on her way down the tunnel - and besides, he had a headache, “It's not to punish me, it's for my safety. Now get lost, the lot of you.”

They were gone in just the nick of time, Madam Pomfrey entered the shack only minutes afterwards. She gave him a quick going over, and, satisfied, walked Remus back up to the castle. She prescribed him a few hours sleep in the hospital wing, which he was more than happy to accept. With all of his friends in Hogsmeade, there wasn't much to miss out on.

He woke at about lunch time, stomach rumbling as usual. Madam Pomfrey had evidently anticipated this; there was a plate of cold cuts and bread on his bedside table, along with a bowl of

fruit and a large goblet of pumpkin juice, which he drained first.

Remus was so ravenous, in fact, that he did not notice the letter propped up in the fruit bowl between two apples until he was well into the construction of his second sandwich. When he saw that it was addressed to him in a script familiar from the hundreds of returned Care of Magical Creatures essays, he almost knocked his plate off the bed in his eagerness to open it.

Dear Remus,

It's a pleasure to hear from you, I don't mind in the least.

I cannot disclose my location at present, but rest assured that I am as safe as it is possible for me to be. I am glad to hear that you are well - Dumbledore told me about your OWL results. I'm incredibly proud of you, Remus, I know you must have worked very hard. Keep on like that and I promise that nothing can stop you.

It is perfectly natural that you should want to know more about Greyback. I only wish I had more to tell you. I am afraid I have never worked on any werewolf-related cases for the ministry - and if you want my opinion, no one has done any useful research into lycanthropy since your father - and as you know, he was quite terribly wrong about a number of things.

I do know that Greyback was a dangerous wizard before he was bitten, and is one of the cruellest men I have ever heard of - save Voldemort himself. The council that freed him against your father's wishes believed him to be a muggle tramp - I would take this to mean that he dresses shabbily, and is a skilled manipulator.

*I'm sorry I can't give you any more than this. I want to emphasise, however that the most important thing we know about Greyback is that **he is dangerous**. If you have even the slightest suspicion that he knows where you are, then must contact Dumbledore immediately. Only Dumbledore can be trusted.*

Best of luck with your NEWTs.

1. *Ferox.*

Remus read this through twice, then read the first paragraph once more, just for the thrill of it. 'I'm incredibly proud of you, Remus'. What a wonderful thing. There was no solid information in there, of course. Nothing Remus hadn't already considered - of course Greyback *must* look homeless; that was the best way to avoid drawing attention to yourself. And Remus was the very last person who needed to hear how dangerous this man was. The letter felt precious, all the same. Only the marauders had ever written to him before.

"Good afternoon dear," Madam Pomfrey emerged from behind the screen. She had a sixth sense for knowing when he was awake.

"Hello," he smiled at her, Ferox's encouraging words still in his mind.

"You're in a good mood," she smiled back, "Though I don't blame you - nearly a perfect night! You're free to go as soon as you like."

"Thanks," He swung his legs out of bed at once, then looked up, quickly, "Er... Madam Pomfrey? Can I ask you something?"

"Of course, Remus," she replied, busying herself about stripping his bed now he had left it. She did it with a sweep of her wand, it was some of the most elegant and seamless magic Remus had ever

seen.

“I’d like to learn about healing spells. Just basic stuff - I’m no good at Potions - actually, I dropped it.”

“Mm, I was sorry to hear that,” she replied, tidying his bedside now, “Potion making is a useful skill.”

“Right, but I just want to be able to sort myself out after a full moon - once school finishes, you know...”

Madam Pomfrey stopped what she was doing and sat on the bed to look at him. When he was a little boy, they were eye to eye when she sat down. Now she had to look up as he towered over her, and he thought for the first time what a very small woman she was. He had never forgotten the morning she had rocked him in her arms, and how safe she made him feel then. He could probably pick her up now, if he wanted to, and somehow she still gave him that same sense of security.

“All right, Remus,” she said, after surveying him, “I teach a small selection of students the basics of healing on Tuesday evenings. You’re welcome to join, if you wish, though there isn’t a qualification in it.”

“I didn’t know you did that!”

She smiled fondly, getting up again and resuming her work,

“It’s to prepare students wishing to begin their training as healers once they leave Hogwarts. I can only presume that healing was not your chosen career path when you spoke with Professor McGonagall last year,”

“Oh yeah, right...” He rubbed the back of his head, slightly embarrassed. He had never thought about healing - largely because he thought it probably involved a *lot* of potions, but also because he was quite certain that no one would want to hire a werewolf to look after vulnerable people.

The common room was nearly empty, it being a nice sunny autumnal day and a Hogsmeade weekend. Remus entered the dorm room quite noisily, allowing the door to slam. James sat up in bed, startled,

“Bloody hell!”

“Oh, sorry!” Remus cringed, “I thought you’d be in Hogsmeade!”

“We were going to,” Sirius rolled over in his own bed, yawning, “But our beds looked so comfortable...”

“Damn, I didn’t mean to sleep that long.” James got up, stretching. “I was going to slip Rosmerta a bit of cash for the Halloween firewhisky, too.”

“Don’t worry, I got Peter to do it.” Sirius replied, lying on his back, making no sign that he planned to get up at all. “Is it lunch time?”

“Yeah,” Remus grinned, pleased to have his friends for an afternoon which he had expected to be very dull and lonely. “Shall we go down?”

“Let me shower first,” James nodded, trailing sleepily towards the bathroom. “Ugh, and I really ought to start that Defence Against the Dark Arts essay on patronuses - have either of you done it?”

“Drafted,” Remus said, flicking through his own pile of homework, “You can take a look if you want, but I bet you know it better than me anyway.”

“Hardly had time for the reading,” James shouted from inside the bathroom. He never shut the door, and treated everywhere like a quidditch locker room, “With the game coming up and these prefect patrols - not that I’m complaining about those... patronuses look really cool though, I wanted to be the first one to do it.”

Remus didn’t respond to this, but he thought James probably *would* be the first to cast a patronus. Not only because he was the best in the year at DADA, but - according to the books Remus had read so far, anyway – it looked like you needed to be able to conjure up a happy thought at extremely short notice. James seemed the most likely to be able to do this. Remus thought he could probably manage it too – but maybe not very quickly. He made a mental note to give it some further thought before the practical lesson.

“So, we’ve sorted the booze,” Sirius was saying – loudly, so that James could hear them over the water running, “Food is easy – and it’ll be right after the feast, anyway, so no one’ll be hungry except Moony.”

“Up yours.” Remus said, blithely, settling onto his own bed, still trying to come up with happy thoughts.

“Decorations...” Sirius continued, smiling, “Well I’ve asked Avni in Hufflepuff to do something creative with pumpkins, so we’ll see how that goes... then all we need is music. You’ll do that again, won’t you, Moony?”

Remus shrugged,

“I could, but last time everyone just put on whatever they wanted anyway.” He didn’t want to admit that he wasn’t particularly looking forward to the Halloween party. Not that he didn’t love getting off his face on firewhisky and watching James make a prat of himself on the dancefloor. But he couldn’t shake the memory of the last Gryffindor common room party, and how that had ended for him.

“That’s fine,” Sirius was reassuring him, “Just get them going for the first few tracks. Er... something they can dance to, this time?”

Remus smirked and raised an eyebrow,

“You *can* dance to Pink Floyd, if you try hard enough.”

“I know you have standards, but er... Mary’s asked if you could stick on some ABBA, maybe?” Sirius asked this with a mild wince, as if it caused him physical pain.

“Oh, Jesus,” Remus flopped back on his bed, dramatically, throwing an arm over his face, “Spare me.”

Sirius laughed, which made even ABBA seem worth it.

“Shit! Mary!” James shouted from the bathroom.

Sirius frowned,

“What?” He yelled back.

James came running out of the bathroom, soaking wet and dripping onto the floorboards, a towel around his waist.

“*Mary!*” He said, again, “You were supposed to treat her to a day out in Hogsmeade, to make up for her birthday!”

“Oh, bugging fuck.” Sirius slapped his head, annoyed, “How do I keep *forgetting?!?*”

“Not your fault, mate,” James said grabbing another towel to dry his hair, making it extra messy in the process. “You’ve been busy.”

Remus thought this was extremely charitable of James, and actually a bit of a lie, really. Sirius was the least busy of the marauders – he hardly bothered with homework, he wasn’t on the quidditch team, did nothing at all extracurricular, and was taking less subjects even than Peter. Other than detentions and a dedicated commitment to practical jokes, Mary was Sirius’s only other real concern.

“Ah, well, she’ll forgive me.” Sirius sighed, “I’ll take her out next time, and really go mad on Valentines day.”

“That’s months away,” Remus reminded him.

Sirius shrugged. James shook his head, putting his glasses on and rooting around in his dresser for clothes,

“Your funeral, mate,” he said, “You’re going to lose that girl if you’re not careful.”

Remus’s heart skipped a beat.

Sixth Year: Halloween

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tuesday 26th October 1976

Boarding the Hogwarts Express in September.

Listening to David Bowie

Listening to T-Rex

Christmas at the Potters

Winning a game of chess

Starting a new book

Finishing a book

Grant's voice on the phone

A perfectly executed prank

Beating Sirius at History

Beating Sirius at *anything*

Running through the forest at full pelt with Padfoot

Sirius Black's smile

Snogging Sirius...

"Ugh, *focus!*" Remus muttered angrily to himself as he stalked through the corridors towards the hospital wing. A group of first year Slytherins who happened to be walking past jumped at his outburst, then scurried away, whispering. *Oh great*, Remus thought, *bet Snape's already told them all about Loony Lupin. Talking to yourself will really help...*

He was on his way to his first study session with Madam Pomfrey and the students putting themselves forward for healer training, and using the spare time to list all of his very happiest memories. Only one memory in particular kept interrupting. *If my patronus is a black dog*, he told himself, *I'll have to leave Hogwarts forever and never show my face again.*

"Hello, Remus! What are you doing here?"

He had reached the hospital wing now, and found Marlene waiting outside, smiling at him, clutching a large textbook to her chest.

"Hiya," He smiled back, "I'm here for the healing lessons."

"Oh wow! I had no idea you wanted to be a healer!" She beamed.

“Er... well yeah, I mean I was just interested... how about you?”

“Oh yes, it’s all I’ve ever wanted to be!” She said, proudly.

Remus tried not to look too taken aback. That felt like the sort of thing he ought to know about his friends – but then, Marlene had always been a bit more private than Lily or Mary.

Secretly, Remus had always felt a special fondness for Marlene. She was quiet and shy, like he was, less abrasive than Mary and less bossy than Lily. He remembered once, in a moment of confusion at the age of thirteen, having decided to fancy her. That embarrassed him now, but he had a feeling that if he told her, she’d see the humour in it. Actually, now that he thought about it, Marlene had the inherent good nature and sensible attitude that probably suited a healer.

Besides this, during Madam Pomfrey’s lesson Marlene was clearly the stand out student. She seemed to know half the spells already, and the medi-witch approvingly told her she had a natural gift. Marlene flushed with pride at this, and Remus realised that it was the first time he’d seen her so confident. She had always seemed to unsure of herself before.

“Blimey, I should just start taking lessons from you!” He said, as they left the sick bay later that evening.

“Oh, shut up,” she grinned, bashfully, “You’ll be running rings around me once you’ve had the chance to catch up.”

“Doubt it,” he nudged her. “Don’t want to be a professional beater, then?”

“Ha, no chance!” She laughed, “You should see the state my brother’s in, and he’s only been professional for a few years. Wouldn’t mind being the healer for the Cannons, though. Or whatever team Potter gets drafted to – then I can still see you all after school finishes.”

“We’ll see each other anyway!” Remus said, “You can’t get rid of us that easily.”

“You’re a sweetie, Remus,” she elbowed him. “Hey, I’m really looking forward to this party – are the rumours true?!”

“Er...”

* * *

Halloween 1976 was due to fall on a Sunday, and due to the nature of the evening, Hogwarts students were given Monday off. This, in Sirius’s mind, could not have been more perfect.

The marauder’s parties had grown legendary in status, and there were whispers all over the castle speculating on what exactly the four boys might have in store. There was mention of copious amounts of alcohol, potential fireworks – Remus heard one Hufflepuff who swore blind they had smuggled in a *real* band, instruments and all.

“What do they think?” Laughed James, “I’m hiding them under my bed? ...er... they might be right about the fireworks, though...”

“James!” Remus groaned, “You’re a *prefect*!”

“Exactly,” he grinned, puffing out his chest, “And I have the authority to sanction any celebrations I see fit.”

Remus had tentatively prodded Lily on this statement – not wanting to get James into trouble, but equally not wanting to see her humiliated, either.

“Look, Remus, after six years I’m learning to just go with the flow as far as you lot are concerned,” she said, not looking up from her Arithmancy charts, “If Potter and Black want a party, they’ll find a way – I’m just going to brush up on extinguishing spells and make sure no one gets hurt. Besides,” - and she did look up, now - “I think everyone needs a bit of cheering up. The war, you know...”

So that was that, then. If Lily Evans was ok with a party, Remus supposed that he would have to be as well. Besides, it was partly to celebrate Sirius’s birthday, too, which fell on the following Wednesday. And you had to be capable of superhuman cruelty to deprive Sirius Black of a birthday celebration.

This was a sore spot with Mary, who had been forgotten about twice now and was rapidly losing patience with her flighty, easily distracted boyfriend. The problem was, she seemed to think that Remus was the best person to vent to about it.

“I’m not an idiot,” she sighed, a few days after forgiving Sirius for his latest slight (not after having charmed all of the goblets on the Gryffindor dining table to suddenly fling their contents into his face), “I knew what he was like before we started going out, and my auntie always says ‘you can’t change a man...’”

“Mm.” Remus replied, hoping this sounded caring and supportive. Evidently it did, because she carried right on talking,

“And, y’know I *like* the fact that he doesn’t follow the rules, and he doesn’t care what anyone thinks. I do just sort of wish he cared what *I* think...”

“I’m sure he does.” Remus mumbled.

“He doesn’t show it, though... and, actually, he’s not the *only* good-looking boy at Hogwarts.” She said this with a wry look on her face, as a tall Ravenclaw seventh year walked past them. Roman Rotherhide – Remus had heard a lot of girls whispering about him. He had curly fair hair as long as Sirius’s, and dark brown eyes.

Mary licked her lips, her own eyes following the older boy as he left the library. Remus slammed his book shut,

“Shall we go?”

* * *

Sunday 31st October 1976

The afternoon of the party, Remus was lying on his bed with the curtains drawn, listening to *Diamond Dogs* for the hundredth time, trying to avoid all of the nonsense going on downstairs. The girls seemed to have joined forces and turned the usually comfortable, slightly worn around the edges Gryffindor common room into a cross between a jumble sale and the Boots cosmetics counter. He could practically smell the perfume from his bed, and it made his nose itch.

They were ‘getting ready’, Mary and Marlene had told him, though Remus couldn’t see what that meant, exactly – except that it seemed to involve a lot of mirrors, a lot of giggling, and an ungodly amount of hairspray.

James was trying out new beaters for the quidditch team, and Remus assumed Sirius was with him. Peter was helping Dezzie ‘choose a dress’ for the party (though Remus suspected this was just a cover story; a glance at the marauders map told him that Peter Pettigrew and Desdemona Lewis were alone in the prefect’s bathroom.)

Alone and exiled from the common room, Remus had considered the library – but Christopher was there, and it looked like he was sitting close to the entrance (a novice error – you got far better light near the back by the windows), which meant that Remus would have to say hello, and Christopher would make some cold, shrugging reply, and eventually Remus was going to have to sort all of that out, but just now he *wasn’t in the bloody mood, ok?!*

Feeling very sorry for himself, he reclined on the bed and raised his wand, lazily levitating the record out of its sleeve and onto the needle. He’d lugged the record player up from its usual spot on Sirius’s shelf and sat it on the end of his bed, hoping that with the bedcurtains drawn he could play it loud enough to drown out the high-pitched chatter drifting up the stairs.

‘In the year of the scavenger, the season of the bitch

Sashay on the boardwalk, scurry to the ditch

Just another future song for lonely little kids...’

“Oh, hello.” Sirius poked his head through the curtains. Remus sat up.

“Hi,” he replied, uneasily, slightly embarrassed, as if he’d been caught doing something he shouldn’t be, “Did you want your record player back?”

“Nah,” Sirius waved a hand. He opened the curtains further, and much to Remus’s horror, climbed inside, crawling onto the bed. He settled down on his back beside Remus and listened to the record with him.

They were quiet for a long while, both staring at the red canopy above them. Remus kept telling himself that Sirius was behaving perfectly normally. He lounged about on James’s bed all the time; it meant nothing.

Finally, much to his relief, Sirius spoke.

“Broke up with Mary.”

Ah. So that was all. Remus raised his eyebrows,

“Really? Sorry about that, mate.”

He felt Sirius shrug beside him,

“Nah, it’s ok. Not like I was in love with her or anything.”

“Plenty more fish in the sea.”

“Yeah,” Sirius chuckled. They both fell quiet again. Bowie’s thin, sharp voice rattled between them. The first song ended and the thunderous swell of *Sweet Thing* began. “Love this track.” Sirius commented. Remus murmured in agreement.

‘If you want it, boys, get it here thing,

Cuz hope, boys, is a cheap thing, cheap thing’

"We did it." Sirius said, suddenly. "Me and Mary."

"You did... *oh*. When?"

"Over the summer. Once or twice since we've been back at Hogwarts."

"Right. Is that... I mean, that's not why she dumped you?"

"No!" Sirius scowled at him, "Thanks for the vote of confidence, but I don't think I was *that* terrible. We just broke up, that's all."

"...How was it?"

"The break up?"

"No! ...How was... *It?!!*"

Sirius smiled enigmatically,

"Oh yeah... it was good. Great. Not like I imagined, but... yeah, good."

"Well... good, then."

"She's really gorgeous. Mary."

"Yeah, she is."

'Then let it be; it's all I ever wanted

It's a street with a deal, and a taste

It's got claws, it's got me, it's got you...'

"Remember when we were kids, and we were convinced Bowie was a wizard?" Sirius said.

Remus smiled fondly at the memory,

"Yeah, I think I still sort of believe he is."

"One day, when we all live in London, we'll go and find him, and then we can ask."

Remus burst out laughing.

"What?!" Sirius grinned back at him.

"You can't just *meet* someone like Bowie!"

"Don't see why not. We could go to one of his gigs, or find out where he lives. Have some imagination, Lupin – once we're of age we can do *anything*."

Rebel Rebel started up next. It was practically Sirius' theme song by now.

"Anything." Remus smirked. "You *already* think you can do anything."

"Calling me arrogant?" Sirius narrowed his eyes, sitting up. He was smiling. Remus smiled back,

"Going to deny it?" He replied, "Your ego is so big it has its own orbit."

"Harsh!"

“Your ego is so big,” Remus continued, slyly, “When you were doing it with Mary you probably closed your eyes and imagined yourself!”

“You wound me, Lupin!” Sirius reached for a pillow and began to beat him with it. Remus kneed him in the shin, rolling over to try and stop Sirius’ onslaught, but Sirius was quicker. Laughing, he clambered on top of Remus, forcing him down, holding his wrists over his head. “Ha!” He cheered, triumphant. “Apologise!”

“No.” Remus cocked an eyebrow, and struggled to get free. Sirius was straddling him now, and braced himself against Remus’ movements, pushing back down.

“You can’t escape!” Sirius said, “I’ve got you, Moony!”

Their eyes met and everything was different. Remus became acutely aware of the lack of space between them, every shape and angle of Sirius’ body that was touching his own. He jerked upwards, deliberately, testing, and Sirius pushed back.

“Sirius,” Remus whispered, tentatively, hearing the catch in his own voice. “What are we doing?”

“Sh,” Sirius shook his head. “Shh,” Sirius said again, leaning forward now, letting go of Remus’ wrists, “Just this... just...” His face was buried in the pillow next to them, Remus could hear his breathing quickening over the opening refrain of *Rock ‘n’ Roll with Me*.

‘You always were the one that knew...’

“Ok,” Remus whispered. *We’ll do this.*

If this was what Sirius wanted, Remus wasn’t going to ask any more questions – he didn’t think he had enough blood left in his brain to formulate a thought, anyway; he was aching, straining with desire, and Sirius was pressing down on him, hitting the very parts of Remus that cared most for pressure. He pushed his hand between them, fumbled with the buttons on their jeans. Sirius stiffened slightly, but allowed it, letting Remus do everything. Letting Remus *touch* him.

He was momentarily shy about his body – how bony his body must seem; how awkward his hands. But soon there was no space left for shyness, Sirius kept moving, and Remus was lost, completely lost in the strange familiarity of another person, and the gorgeous smell of Sirius’s hair.

It was over almost as quickly as it had begun. All it took was the right angle against Sirius’s hip and Remus gasped, twitching, seeing stars, and a second later Sirius let out a muffled cry into the bedsheets.

In the quiet moments that followed, they lay breathless and tense. Then Sirius propped himself back up, and climbed off, rolling over onto his back. They said nothing as they did up their trousers and straightened their clothes. Remus refused to be the first to speak.

“Got a bit carried away.” Sirius said, clearing his throat.

Remus blinked.

“Right...” He swallowed, dryly.

“Sorry.”

“What? No, it’s ok.”

Sirius looked awkward – Remus had never seen him look so out of his depth before.

“I’m going to have a shower. Not long until the feast.”

“Right.” Remus nodded again, watching Sirius carefully climb out of the bed and back through the curtains. He stopped and turned back quickly, looking slightly panicked,

“You won’t tell anyone?”

Remus snorted and shook his head.

“s’if I would.”

Sirius nodded, and closed the curtain behind him.

Remus flopped back on the bed, his mind still catching up. If he wasn’t so confused, he’d be furious.

Chapter End Notes

A 'Jumble Sale' is the UK version of a 'Rummage Sale'.

'Boots' is a British chain of chemists (pharmacies) which sells make up and beauty.

Sixth Year: Parties and Pustules

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He's in love with rock'n'roll, woah

He's in love with gettin' stoned, woah

He's in love with Janie Jones, woah

He don't like his boring job, no

And he knows what he like to do

He knows he's gonna have fun with you

You lucky lady!

Sunday 31st October 1976

The 1976 Hogwarts Halloween feast was so terrible that Remus's first order of business immediately afterwards was to get as drunk as humanly possible.

It wasn't terrible in any outward kind of way, of course. The food was delicious, as usual – a glorious golden hog roast with apple crumble covered in goopy yellow custard for pudding. It was just terrible for Remus. Sirius wasn't rude, or cold – he wasn't even trying to avoid Remus. It was exactly his dreadful dedication to normality that made it so awful. He smiled. He laughed. He joked. He called Remus 'Moony' without a trace of shame. Remus had no choice but to follow his lead – after all, he'd promised not to tell.

Mind you, he hadn't the first clue how you *would* tell somebody a thing like that.

"Oi, James, has Sirius ever sort of got into bed with you and then you sort of ended up touching quite a bit?"

Oh god, what if he *had*?! There was also Lily, of course, the most sympathetic person Remus knew after James – though the thought of talking to a *girl* about that sort of thing was mortifying. Mary was the most sexually experienced person Remus knew – and he absolutely, one hundred percent, could *not* talk to her about Sirius.

Not that she'd have been upset. As the party got into full swing (Remus knocked back three shots of whisky as soon as the opportunity presented), Mary descended from the girls' dorm dressed to kill in a very tight red dress, which made even Remus stare for a few seconds. Roman Rotherhide of Ravenclaw was first to offer her a drink, and the two spent the rest of the evening entirely absorbed in each other, in one way or another.

Remus skulked by the record player for a bit, deliberately putting on the most abrasive, least danceable records he could find. The Stooges' *We Will Fall*, swiftly followed by *Sister Ray*, then some Captain Beefheart for good measure. Eventually he was overpowered by a group of fourth year girls, who ganged up on him clutching David Cassidy and Bay City Rollers LPs. After that,

he devoted himself to the punch bowl.

Sirius was having a good time, obviously. He and James were gregarious hosts, as always, making the rounds like the good pureblood heirs they were. The common room kept filling up as students came from all over the castle, and it got so warm that Remus ended up taking a bottle of Witches Brew he'd topped up with whisky, and sitting alone by the open window chain smoking.

Marlene approached at some point, to see if he was ok, and to ask if Sirius was seeing anyone else, now that he and Mary were over. Remus scowled at the hopeful look in her eyes and told her he didn't give a shit. She frowned, but left him alone after that.

At about nine o'clock, things got *really* hazy. The last thing he remembered was Peter and Desdemona's pitch perfect performance of *Paradise by the Dashboard Light* (trust Peter to like Meatloaf, out of all the muggle music in the world). Remus vaguely remembered smiling stupidly as the pair of them flung each other about the room, red and sweating but having the time of their lives, belting out the duet at the top of their lungs.

You gotta do what you can

And let mother nature do the rest

Ain't no doubt about it

We were doubly blessed

'Cause we were barely seventeen

And we were barely dressed...

The next thing Remus knew, he was in the dorm bathroom, bent over the toilet bowl, choking his guts out. He must have got there a bit late, because his shirt and trousers were wet and stinking. The room whirled and lurched, and he lay down on the soothing cold tiles, as the closing bars of *Rebel Rebel* wafted up the stairs.

"Oi, Moony! Wakey wakey, mate," James's voice boomed into his throbbing head a few hours later.

"Gnuuughh."

"Bloody hell," James sighed, "*Scourgify!* C'mon, up you get, it's Padfoot's turn to puke..."

Remus blinked at the bright light, and tried to crawl to his feet. Their bathroom was small to begin with, just room for a sink, toilet and bathtub. There wasn't *really* room for three lanky sixteen-year-old boys, two of whom were so drunk they could barely stand. Remus backed into the sink as Sirius flung himself at the toilet bowl, noisily throwing up. Luckily his hair was tied back.

Remus blinked again, staring dopily at him for a while, before James gently yanked him up by the elbow,

"C'mon Moony, me old pal, time for bed, eh?"

"Mm." He mumbled, feeling childish and helpless. He allowed James to lead him out of the bathroom and towards his bed. *Ugh*. The sheets were still rumpled, and Sirius's record player was still perched precariously at the foot. James moved this as Remus clambered under the covers, still in his jeans and socks.

“Pfft, you were supposed to be the responsible one,” James huffed, jokily, as he drew the bed curtains. “Night night, Moony.”

“Jaaaaames...” Sirius whined from the bathroom. James tutted, and Remus closed his eyes.

The hangover the next day was so horrendous Remus thought he’d probably never drink again.

* * *

Wednesday 10th November 1976

In the week that followed, Remus was completely on edge whenever Sirius was around. They weren’t ever alone together – and it was hard to tell whether or not this had been engineered by Sirius, or whether it was just a consequence of being at boarding school. Certainly, Remus made no effort to catch him alone – who knew what might happen?!

There were plenty of explanations, of this he was certain. He just had to think about it. Perhaps Sirius was just *up* for it – they were both teenage boys, after all. Remus had been readily available, and hadn’t put up any resistance. Perhaps this was the sort of thing rich boys *did* at boarding school. Find a bit of rough to rub up against. It could even be a bit of Sirius’ canine side coming out.

The worst part was that Remus didn’t actually *care* what the reason had been. He just wanted it to happen again. As guilty as he knew he ought to feel, he spent every night lying in his bed and wishing, wishing that Sirius would come creeping over. Or that he, Remus, had the courage to get up and go to Sirius himself. But the courage never came, and after a week (which comprised Sirius’s birthday, a Hogsmeade weekend, Bonfire Night *and* a full moon) Remus simply had to try and give up on it.

As usual when facing a crisis, Remus had composed a trusty list to help even out his thinking. This one was titled: *Reasons to forget the Sirius situation*.

1. Sirius clearly wanted to pretend it had never happened. A good friend ought to respect his wishes.
2. Remus wanted to be a good friend, because, after all, losing a friend was potentially much worse than never touching Sirius again. Wasn’t it?
3. Sirius was making no bones about his deep and abiding attraction to girls. All girls. Every girl.

This last point was the most salient. A contributing factor to Remus’s messy downfall at the Halloween party had been Sirius’s dogged attempts to flirt with every girl in the room over fifteen. Extremely successful attempts. By the time the next weekend rolled around, it was common knowledge that Sirius was now casually seeing Avni Chaudry, the Hufflepuff who had enchanted the pumpkins to glow in the dark.

This was a familiar situation, by now, and Remus was at least glad that he wasn’t a prefect anymore, and ran no risk of stumbling upon Sirius and Avni snogging in the Astronomy tower. He did start avoiding the greenhouses, though.

Life plodded on. Remus’s study group slowly re-banded, sidling up to him one by one in the common room, or the library, to politely enquire whether the seat next to him was taken, and then – once he had confirmed its availability – settling in and asking if he would mind just checking something for them, or giving his opinion on some point or other. Remus didn’t mind. It was a good distraction, and much healthier than getting stoned, at least. Christopher did not join in, but

Remus supposed he might just be busy with his OWLs.

The third full moon of the year went just as well as the previous two – James swore he'd caught sight of a unicorn, really really, this time. And the lessons with Madam Pomfrey became an unexpected delight, to the point where Remus was now competent at healing minor abrasions and bruises. No more TCP for him.

So really, he told himself repeatedly, he, Remus John Lupin, had no reason at all to be unhappy. Everything was *as it should be* - even James and Lily were getting along without any hexes or curses being thrown. The emptiness was only inside him – his outer life was fuller than ever.

In light of all of this, he was quite surprised to receive a letter one quiet afternoon in the library. Actually, 'received a letter' might be overstating it. A paper aeroplane stabbed him in the back of his head, while he was trying to concentrate on converting an Agrippan arithmetic equation into the Chaldean form. He hissed in pain and grabbed it, glaring around. He was alone, but he knew exactly who was to blame. James's locomotor charms were legendary. He unfolded it, smoothed it out and began to read.

Marauders assemble! We have lain dormant too long.

Tonight. Midnight. Garden tapestry. Mischief.

He couldn't help but smile. They hadn't done a proper prank in ages.

* * *

Thursday 11th November 1976 (Midnight)

"Who's that?"

"It's me."

"Oh, hiya Moony, you found the cloak then. Sirius with you?"

"I thought he was with you!"

"Nah, I had patrol."

"What about Wormtail?"

"He's here, on my shoulder. We didn't fit otherwise."

"You two are making so much noise."

"Padfoot!"

"Prongs."

"How did you get here without the cloak?"

"I walked, you wuss."

"Lucky Filch didn't see you."

"I was born lucky."

The 'garden tapestry' was on the ground floor, only a few yards away from the entrance to the dungeons. From this, Remus had surmised that the prank would be aimed at Slytherin. He was not wrong. James had a very large wooden box with him, which he was propelling along with his patented locomotion charm.

"Some of the bubotubers accidentally cross-bred with some puffball mushrooms," he whispered, as they crept down the stairs to the dungeons. "Professor Sprout asked me to chuck them on the compost heap, but I thought that would be a waste..."

"Where are we going to put them?" Sirius whispered back, excitedly.

"Well I don't know this year's Slytherin password – any of you?"

They all shook their heads, except for Peter, who – still perched on James's shoulder – gave a negative sounding squeak. James sighed, only mildly disappointed, "Then I thought we could probably just leave them scattered about a bit – they're just about ready to spore, I reckon..."

Once they had reached the dingy, cave-like lower levels of the castle, Peter transformed back into himself, and James set down his crate. He lifted the lid to present a bounty of at least one hundred large, yellowish, gently pulsating mushrooms.

"Eugh." Peter said.

"Yup," James grinned, lifting one carefully out of the box. It was about the size of a tennis ball, "Don't squeeze 'em, they're full of pus and ready to blow."

"This is going to be *excellent*." Sirius grinned, reaching in and grabbing two.

They quickly and efficiently began squirrelling away the weird, pimpleish fungus – behind sconces, over doorways, under carpets and inside suits of armour. The puffball-bubotuber hybrids were throbbing unpleasantly in their hands, and Remus thought James was right; they were ready to go off at any minute, leaving the dungeons covered in foul-smelling yellow pus.

They had maybe half finished with the box, when Remus's ears pricked – he had the strange sense he was being watched. Whirling around, he spotted the glowing yellow eyes of Mrs Norris, peering around the corner with that smug, spiteful look on her squashed face.

"Shit," he whispered, "Quick, look!"

"Oh bugger!" James said, "You three take the cloak and hide, I'll--"

"Who's there?" Filch's voice barked.

"Quick!" James hissed, and began running in the opposite direction.

Peter, Sirius and Remus looked at each other, before telepathically deciding to duck into the nearest open doorway – which just so happened to be the girl's loos.

"That fucking cat has it in for me," Sirius muttered, "Ever since I became an Animagus."

"You can talk!" Peter replied testily, wringing his hands. Remus had dragged the box of mushrooms in behind them, and was desperately looking for a place to hide it.

"Push it in front of the door!" Sirius said.

"I don't think that will--"

“Locomoto!”

“No!”

Sirius was not as good at this charm as James. He always put a bit too much force behind it. It was all Remus could do to duck down and cover his head, as the crate of delicate bubotuber-puffballs slammed loudly into the bathroom door, setting off every last pustule with a sickening squelch.

Peter disappeared completely, shrinking down to rat-size at the very last moment, and scuttling down the nearest drain for refuge. Sirius, ever-confident in his abilities, simply stood there looking stupid as gallons and gallons of pus exploded in his face, coating the entire bathroom in the process.

It was sometimes very easy not to idolise Sirius Black.

Chapter End Notes

The lyrics at the beginning are from 'Janie Jones', by The Clash.

Paradise by the Dashboard Light by Meatloaf (ignore Remus's opinion, he's a music snob - Meatloaf is God).

Sixth Year: Boundaries

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I can't help from crying

Oh no, boy, you ain't done nothing wrong

You just make me feel so good it hurts me

Cuz I've been without you so long

And now I got a good kinda hurt

I got a good kinda hurt

Oh boy, you make me, you really make me come alive

Friday 12th November 1976

They were caught, of course – just Sirius and Remus. Peter's quick thinking had got him out of it, and James had run fast enough in time. He wanted to tell McGonagall that the whole thing had been his idea, but Sirius wouldn't let him.

Their head of house gave them one of the worst dressing downs they'd had in years – made all the worse by the fact that she was clad in her tartan nightie and dressing down, which was not amusing in the slightest, but extremely terrifying. They stood in her office, heads hung, dripping pus until she dismissed them to bed. Twenty house points lost, and detention until Christmas. Ah well.

"You both have an hour free before lunch tomorrow," she said, as a parting barb, "I expect both of you to report to the dungeons in order to clean up your mess. *Without magic.*"

Sirius was furious, and after he'd washed went to bed without another word. Pete sat on the end of his own bed, looking pale faced and worried.

"I'm really sorry!" He whispered to Remus, desperately, "I panicked, sometimes I just lose control when I'm scared..."

"S'ok," Remus replied, tiredly, "It's only detention."

"Anyway," James piped up from his bed, "They didn't find any of the puffballs we hid, yet..."

James was quite right, and in a sublime twist of fate, the bubotuber-puffballs exploded early the next morning, just as most of the Slytherin students were on their way from the dungeons to the Great Hall for breakfast. So at least the evening had not been a complete waste of time.

"It was you two?!" Lily stared at Remus, amazed, when he told her why he couldn't meet her in the library before lunch, "Not Black and Potter, Black and *you*?!"

"Don't have to act that surprised," he frowned, "I'm capable of being an idiot as much as anyone else is."

“No, but I thought you and Sirius were on the outs.”

“Why would you think that?!”

“Oh, something Mary said, I suppose...”

“What did Mary say?” Remus felt a flare of heat shoot up his neck – had Sirius told Mary something? Some stupid slip of the tongue while they were cosying up together?

“I don’t know,” Lily looked mildly surprised, “Ask her, I can’t really remember, I just thought she said something about the two of you not talking. Anyway, if you could please try not to destroy any more bathrooms this year? Gryffindor’s got the lowest house points already, and it’s not even Christmas.”

The surprise corridor attacks had lost twenty more house points from Gryffindor, and an extra night’s detention for Remus and Sirius. James was terribly guilty, but Sirius’s sense of chivalry and honour got in the way, and he still wouldn’t let him confess.

Of course, it was a very different story later that day, when he and Remus were standing outside the cordoned off bathroom, waiting for Filch to arrive with buckets and mops.

“Bloody Wormtail, this is all his fault.”

“No it isn’t.” Remus yawned, leaning against the wall. He hadn’t had enough sleep.

“The little twerp ran away like the vermin he is!”

“Hey, be nice,” Remus frowned, “He only did that because *someone* got over excited and blew up all those mushrooms.”

“I was thinking on my feet.” Sirius raised his chin, defiantly.

“You weren’t thinking at all.”

“Well *you* weren’t doing anything!”

“I was trying to hide it! If we’d hidden the box and got under the cloak, no one would have got in trouble at all!”

“Well you didn’t say that at the time!” Sirius snapped.

“You didn’t give me a chance!”

“He still didn’t have to run away.” Sirius folded his arms, leaning against the opposite wall.

Tired and grumpy, Remus spat back,

“James ran away too. Don’t see you cursing *his* name.”

Sirius glared at him, furiously. How dare anyone speak against James Potter in the presence of Sirius Black. Remus rolled his eyes and stared at the ceiling until Filch arrived.

Argus Filch was one of the most unpleasant adults Remus had ever met. Matron would have liked him. A bitter, spiteful, creeping man on the wrong side of middle age, Filch was a caretaker and a sneak, who seemed to hate students more than anyone who worked in a school really ought to. This was never more evident than when he was permitted to administer detentions.

He dropped two large wooden buckets at their feet with a malicious grin on his face, and pushed the door open. Overnight, the pus seemed to have dried and left a thick yellowish crust over most of the surfaces it had hit. Remus wrinkled his nose. Filch handed them both mops and scrubbing brushes.

“I’ll be back to check on you on two hours.” He said, “You ought to be done by then. No wands and no funny business.” He sneered as he left them to it.

Remus looked at Sirius, who was obviously still annoyed with him. He straightened his back,

“I’ll start over there,” he nodded to the far end of the bathroom, “You go over there.” He indicated the opposite end.

“Fine.” Remus shrugged, lifting his bucket and filling it at the sink. Yes, actually, that was perfect. They’d keep to their own sides and just get this stupid thing over with.

Sirius still wasn’t talking to him, and turned his back, working in silence. Remus followed suit. Two could play at that game. Sirius was making it much easier.

Remus would never admit it, but he didn’t mind cleaning, and actually found it quite satisfying. As disgusting as the pus looked, it came away from the white tile easily with a bit of soap and water, so the work wasn’t too physically taxing, until it came to wiping down the walls. This was harder just because of all the reaching and stretching, which tired him out and made his shoulders ache.

Additionally, bubotuber pus wasn’t *actually* pus, according to the Herbology textbook Remus had skimmed in a hurry before turning up to clean it – in that it wasn’t dirty or toxic. In fact, it had several healing properties – and while this gunk was from an accidental cross-bred strain, it probably couldn’t do any more harm than pumpkin juice.

The little bathroom was eerily quiet, with the two boys silently working and only the occasional sloshing sound of them filling up their buckets or swabbing the floor. Remus didn’t mind the cold atmosphere, either – it actually helped him concentrate. He had known for a long time that his feelings for Sirius rarely got in the way of his ability to be irritated by Sirius.

By the time the first hour was up, they had managed to remove all trace of the mess, and all that was left to do was a final rinse down. Remus rinsed his bucket a few more times, and took the opportunity to wash his hands and his face, which had grown hot from exertion. Sirius joined him at the sink, but they didn’t speak.

“Nearly finished,” Remus tried, tentatively.

Sirius snorted, annoyed,

“No thanks to Wormt-”

“Shut up about Wormtail, will you?!” Remus said, exasperated, “Grow up!”

Sirius frowned, and said nothing. He washed his hands and face too. Remus tried not to watch. He turned back to his own wall, and began squeezing clear water across it, wiping away what was left of the soap suds.

A shadow appeared at his shoulder, and he braced himself for more bickering.

“You missed a bit.” Sirius huffed, grumpily, elbowing Remus out of the way and scrubbing it himself. Affronted, Remus scowled back at him,

“Thought we were sticking to our *own* sides.”

“Yeah, thought you could be trusted to do a decent job.”

“If I didn’t have you breathing down my neck the whole time!”

“You’re so sensitive,” Sirius snapped.

“Nah, you’re just acting like a prick.” Remus elbowed him, harder than he really meant to.

Sirius shoved him against the wall, and Remus slipped, grabbing Sirius to steady himself. Furious, he pushed him back. “Wanker.” He said.

Sirius kissed him.

Sirius kissed like nobody else; languid, firm and unhurried. Remus responded instantly, hands fisting the material of Sirius’s shirt, wanting to run his fingers through the other boy’s hair. But Sirius broke away before he could, stepping back, looking horrified with himself. His lips were pink and shining, slightly parted. Remus had to look away.

“Remus I’m... shit, I’m sorry. I dunno what keeps happening to me.”

“S’ok.” Remus said, not meeting his eyes.

“You know I’m *not a--*”

“Yeah,” Remus said, “Yeah, course. Me neither.” He said it quickly and without thinking. He said it to stop Sirius saying that word.

They were quiet for a bit more. Remus’s heart was racing, he could hardly think straight. He reached out, catching the thin white fabric of Sirius’s shirt between his fingers and tugging it slightly, finally meeting Sirius’s eyes.

“No one’s gonna find out,” Remus said, quietly, echoing something he had been told once.

Sirius gazed back at him, his eyes burning.

“You won’t say anything?”

Remus shook his head as Sirius came a little closer. Remus continued, braver now,

“I won’t. We... we don’t have to stop. Unless you want to—”

Sirius kissed him, full on the mouth again. They both knew they had crossed a line, but it couldn’t be helped now, and it was so, so good, and their bodies were hard against each other, hands fumbling with belt buckles, as if they’d known this was the plan all along.

Once it was over, they clung to each other for long, exhausted seconds. Then Sirius withdrew carefully, stepping back. Remus longed to pull him close again, to never stop. He touched Sirius’s hair one last time, pretending to push it back into place. They stared into each other’s eyes, bold and unashamed for a few short seconds.

“You’re lovely.” Sirius said, so softly.

Remus could only smile back gently, he didn’t know what to say. The room had grown cold. “C’mon,” Sirius started buttoning his trousers, looking away, finally, “We’d better finish this

cleaning.”

Remus nodded, still mute, unable to do much more than lean back against the wall as he watched Sirius wash his hands again, and pick up his mop. The sight of him walking away was too familiar, and Remus burst out,

“You’re not--don’t run off, this time.”

Sirius looked back, a bit surprised, and a bit something else.

“I’m not going anywhere, Moony.” He spoke gently.

“Oh, ok. Good, then.”

“I felt bad about that. Last time. Sorry.” He was on the other side of the room now, and maybe that made it easier to talk. “But I thought you’d be angry or something. I dunno.”

“No, I wasn’t.”

“We’re still friends, aren’t we?”

“Of course! We’ll always be friends, Padfoot.”

Remus was making a promise, though his brain was too foggy to really recognise it at the time.

Sirius had acknowledged, however shyly, that whatever kept happening was probably going to happen again. He had assumed the role he always did – impulsive, expectant and irresponsible. For his part, Remus took up his own mantle – the one who *would* be responsible. He would keep the secrets; he would accept what he was given; he would be responsible. *If those are the things he needs*, Remus decided, *then those are the things I can give him*. It was nothing at all.

Brave, Sirius had called him once, in another bathroom, not so long ago. Remus hadn’t known then whether or not he was, really, but he had liked the sound of it at the time, and he liked it even more now. Now, with the taste of Sirius still on his lips, and the echoes of pleasure still settling in his body.

As he watched Sirius finish sluicing down the far wall, encouraging the water down the drain with his mop, and glancing up to smile, now and then, Remus realised that what he had been waiting for all this time was for *Sirius* to be brave. What occurred to him, now, with the clarity of a lightning bolt, was that he, Remus, could be brave for both of them.

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'Good Kind of Hurt' by the Pleasure Seekers.

Sixth Year: New Normal

Chapter Summary

CW mention of sexual stuff in this chapter, but nothing direct.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Oh shadow love was quick and clean, life's a well-thumbed machine

I saw you watching from the stairs, you're everyone that ever cared

Oh lordy, oh lordy, you know I need some loving

I'm movin', touch me!

John, I'm only dancing

She turns me on, but I'm only dancing

She turns me on, don't get me wrong

I'm only dancing...

Mid-December 1976

After that, it happened often. He never initiated it; he didn't need to. Sirius came to him. Remus would find himself pulled into an empty classroom, or their shared bathroom - once or twice Sirius even crept quietly into Remus's bed, casting a silencing spell before forcing his shoulders down and running his hands over Remus's body, quaking with desire. Never under the covers though - that would be queer. He would scurry out as soon as it was over.

It almost always happened in a hurry. Remus knew that this was partly the shame of it. But he also knew that it was because they both just *needed* it so badly – when they were together their bodies buzzed with the want for each other.

No two times were the same. Sometimes they could be confident and bold, other times they were shy, and one needed encouragement from the other. Sometimes it wasn't even about getting off, and they were limited to just kissing – or at least, Sirius's idea of kissing, which was brutal, fierce, and thankless. Remus's lips felt scorched, burned raw, for days and days.

Afterwards they didn't talk about it, but - if time permitted - sat apart from each other and invariably shared a cigarette, silent until they were ready to fall slowly back into their usual jokey banter. Remus felt at those times that Sirius probably would have preferred to be with someone else. A girlfriend or – even worse – James.

I'm not the one he wants, Remus told himself, pitifully, *I'm just the one that's here*. The worst part

was that he knew that it was enough. If Sirius only ever came to him in darkness and silence, then so be it. It was better than going without. *That someone like me gets to have someone like him.*

He had to share, of course. Whether it was Sirius's desire to hide what was going on, or he was simply unable to stay committed to one person, after Avni there were others. A parade of pretty, bright, cheerful girls; Florence and Daisy and Tessa and Eunice. Remus didn't think any of these trysts were serious, and in the beginning at least, he didn't begrudge Sirius his fun. *I never asked for anything more*, he told himself.

And Remus liked it being private. He had never been someone who liked attention, and he thought that even if it was a given that whatever he and Sirius were doing was no different to what Sirius did with any of the *girls* he got attached to, then Remus would probably still prefer that James and Peter did not know. Maybe he could have told them about Grant, one day, eventually - but not Sirius. It was too complicated.

He *liked* knowing that he and Sirius could be in a room full of people, and no one had a clue what they had been doing only the night before, or even two hours earlier. He liked getting away with it. He liked seeing Sirius with a girl, and thinking *never mind, later he belongs to me*.

He was allowed to be happy, after all. He was allowed to have *something* all for himself - especially as, in other areas in Remus's life, doors were closing, and things were being taken away.

There was another werewolf attack during the December moon, which fell early in the month that year. Witnesses described more than one creature - they were working as a pack. The ministry was placed on high alert, and the whole school was talking about it. The marauders didn't bring it up around Remus - not even Sirius. He couldn't blame them; he'd have bitten their head off if anyone had tried to sympathise, or be kind about it.

Still, he had to put up with everyone else; every other student in the school who had taken to wearing silver jewellery, or talking about the best way to fend off a wolf attack.

"They ought to round them all up!" He overheard one fifth year telling anyone who would listen in the dining hall one evening. "Keep them locked up, away from normal people!"

"Why can't they tag them?" Avni whispered, the next afternoon, when she, Sirius, Remus, Peter and Lily were watching the Gryffindor quidditch team practice. "I mean, there's already a registry, and they can trace underage wizards - why not put a trace on dangerous animals?! It doesn't make sense."

"They're not animals," Lily hissed through gritted teeth, "They're *people*."

Remus kept his eyes on the pitch. So did Sirius.

"Tell that to the Mundays!" Avni replied, straightening her skirt and giving Lily a superior look, "Tell that to this latest poor family." She shuffled closer to Sirius on the bench, hugging his arm,

"Sirius, darling, I'm cold..."

"Go in, then." He grunted, shaking her off, eyes still on James, shouting something at his keeper.

"Excuse me?" Avni frowned.

"You heard me." Sirius replied, offhanded, "Piss off."

None of them saw much of Avni after that.

But it didn't stop other people talking. Remus had to disband his study group early because they all wanted to know if he could recommend any good books on 'half breeds' and defence against dark creatures. In the end all he could do was tell them to talk to the DADA teacher, and if they didn't want help with actual school work, then they may as well leave him alone.

Lily found Remus working late that night in the common room trying to catch up on the work he'd missed while in the hospital wing after the moon. He was exhausted and sore and extremely prickly but she came over and sat beside him anyway, resting a head on his shoulder, an arm around his back. She smelled nice, and gave him a gentle squeeze, sighing softly against his collar bone. She didn't speak, but Remus would always be grateful for that.

In mid-December, matters worsened. Remus received two letters.

Dear Remus,

I hope that your sixth year is going well. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but as you may already know, there was an attack during last night's full moon.

[Remus rolled his eyes at this. Why did adults always think that teenagers didn't read the news? Especially when they were in the middle of a war, and in concerned them directly?!]

I have no doubt that Professor McGonagall will be speaking to you soon, but I thought I would get in touch. I have been talking to Alastor Moody, who is concerned for your safety. He tells me that you stay with the Potters every year at Christmas. The Potters are excellent people, and I know that James is a close friend, but, Remus, they cannot be relied upon to protect you. They would do everything they could - of this I have no doubt, but my feeling is that if Greyback attempted track you down, then the only place he could not find you would be Hogwarts.

I am not telling you what to do, of course. But I am begging you to consider your own safety and the safety of those around you.

Best wishes,

L. Ferox

Well, Ferox was quite clearly telling him what to do, even if he was just passing on instructions from Moody. Remus's heart sank when he finished reading this letter, but there was worse to come:

Mr Lupin,

It has come to our attention that upon your seventeenth birthday next year, you will be of legal age as defined by your society.

While the law of the United Kingdom states that you are still a child, we have been informed that your circumstances override this legislation.

As of 10th March 1977, you will no longer be under the care of St Edmund's Boys Reformatory. Any items or financial assets held in trust for you will be returned to you no later than thirty

working days following this date. There should be no need for you to return to the premises.

We wish you the very best in your future endeavours.

Sincerely,

Mrs. J. Orwell.

Fuck. Remus read this letter only once, then shoved it down into the very bottom of his trunk. He couldn't think about that now.

He told the marauders about the first letter - omitting the Greyback details, of course. He had to; there was no other way to explain why he could not come to London for Christmas. More time for homework, he told himself. He mightn't be the only student staying; the seventh years with NEWTs coming up might stick around to take advantage of an empty common room. He could probably enjoy quite a pleasant Christmas in the library, if he wanted to. Plus a Hogwarts Christmas dinner was nothing to turn your nose up at.

"It's not bloody fair." James ranted, when he heard, "You're no danger to anyone, the full moon isn't until the new year!"

"It's the pack thing, though," Remus replied, loosening his tie and flopping down on the bed. It had been a very long day of lessons, and he had at least three hours of homework ahead of him.

"They're worried I'll get captured or join up or something."

"I thought Ferox liked you," Sirius frowned, dropping his book bag carelessly in the middle of the room, "He ought to know you'd never join *them*."

"He does know," Remus said, "But he thinks they might force me or... well, none of us really know what might happen if I met another one..."

James, Peter and Sirius exchanged an uncomfortable look. Remus pulled off his itchy school jumper, to give them a moment to think about it. When he resurfaced, his hair fizzing with static, he gave them his biggest grin,

"It's fine, anyway, I really don't mind. It'll be great to have some peace and quiet; I'm looking forward to a Christmas break from you lot."

James chuckled, and shook his head. He grabbed his maroon quidditch duffle bag,

"None of us believe you, Moony. Right, I've got practice, then an hour for homework, then patrolling with Evans." Anyone else might have reeled off this list of obligations with a weary air of martyrdom. But James looked as though he was having the best day of his life. "Fancy it, Black?"

"Nah, you're alright, Prongs," Sirius shook his head. He hadn't stopped looking at Remus since he'd unbuttoned his school shirt. "You go on, I'll get a head start on that Charms homework..."

"Yeah, right," James smirked, "Who is it tonight, Florence again? See you." He clattered down the stairs, whistling a chirpy tune.

Sirius turned to Peter.

“You go and watch him then, Pete, if you fancy?”

“Nah,” Peter shook his head. He looked worryingly comfortable sitting on his bed, leaning against the headboard with his Charms notes scattered before him.

“Oh right, you’re probably seeing Dezzie?”

“Nope,” he shook his head, licking the end of his quill nib, “She’s got patrol tonight. And she says we need to get serious about our studies now we’re NEWT students... Can I do my homework with you two?”

Remus and Sirius looked at each other. Sirius raised an eyebrow. Remus shrugged. Sirius got up.

“I tell you what - I forgot to return that book to the library. Better go and - oh, Moony, while I’m at it, wasn’t there another book you told me I should...”

“Oh, right, yeah!” Remus jumped up too, struggling into a clean woollen jumper, “Er... it’s a complicated title, I’d better help you find it.”

“Oh, do you want to re-locate to the library, then?” Peter asked, finally looking up from his notes.

“No point,” Sirius said, as they both bolted for the door, “Won’t take long...”

“Won’t take long?!” Remus muttered, on the stairs.

“I had to say something!”

They made it through the common room without interference, but once they were outside in the halls, they were a bit lost.

“What about the fourth floor girl’s--” Sirius started,

“No.” Remus snapped.

“Fine. Er... Charms classroom is free, I think? On Fridays Flitwick finishes early and there aren’t any clubs.”

“How do you know that?!”

“Oh, shut up and follow me,” Sirius smirked.

They put a basic alarm spell on the door and shoved a desk in front of it for good measure - but Friday afternoons were typically pretty safe; everyone wanted to pretend the classrooms didn’t exist.

Afterwards, they redressed, smoothed their hair and sat on Flitwick’s desk smoking.

“We’re going to actually have to go to the library now.” Remus said, blowing a chain of rings.

“Nah,” Sirius shook his head, “Just say they didn’t have it in.”

“Well that would be fine, except I was actually planning to do my Charms essay this evening...”

Sirius rolled his beautiful eyes and tossed his beautiful hair. Remus fought the urge to sigh.

The classroom was the same side of the castle as the quidditch pitch. They could hear the faint but

shrill sound of James's captain whistle somewhere below them. Sirius exhaled smoke, wistfully. Remus wondered how much he missed playing quidditch. He wondered if he ought to ask, or whether that would be too much.

"Moony, are you definitely not coming for Christmas?"

"Yeah. I've got to trust Ferox. He knows me, he knew my dad."

"He knew your dad? You never told us."

"I don't have to tell you lot everything," Remus gave an irritated twitch, sucking hard on his cigarette. "He worked with him, we had a few chats about it, that's all."

"Well, if you trust him then."

"I do." Remus was aware of his tone, but did nothing to temper it.

"Ok! I was just going to say..." Sirius swallowed, "Well, I mean, I could stay too. Over Christmas. At Hogwarts. If it's ok with you."

"Oh." Remus frowned, caught off guard, and turned to look at Sirius. "Do you want to?"

"You shouldn't be stuck all by yourself, James has his family - and Pete, if he gets really desperate."

"Yeah, but won't they expect you? James's parents? They're mad about you."

He caught Sirius's smile at that - a brilliant flash of elation, which made Remus's heart beat faster.

"They can have a Christmas as a family, for once, without me crashing in. C'mon, Moony, don't want to share the common room with me? I'll be quiet and let you study if that's what you really want."

He gave a coy smile, and Remus stubbed out his cigarette, leaned over and kissed him, hard. He still hadn't really got used to being able to do that.

"As if." He said, pulling away, revelling in the warm blush in Sirius's cheeks.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'John, I'm Only Dancing' by David Bowie.

Sixth Year: Mince Pies

Wednesday 15th December 1976

“Ok, so I probably won’t have time for another one of these until next term,” Remus told his study group, glancing at the nearby grandfather clock. It was almost nine o’clock in the evening. He looked up at their eager faces, and had to look down at his papers again - it was unnerving, commanding that much attention, “But I’m here almost every night anyway, so if you just had some quick questions...”

“Thanks, Lupin,” the group chorused as they began to tidy up and disband.

“Happy Christmas,” he nodded, as they dispersed off to their own corners of the common room, or else to bed.

He fancied an early night himself. It was the last week of term and he’d pretty much completed all of his work, unless his professors were feeling cruel enough to assign more in the last days before Christmas. He yawned, and stretched, leaning back on his chair with his eyes closed.

“Ahem.” Someone still sitting at the table cleared their throat awkwardly. Remus opened his eyes, embarrassed, and swung forward on his chair.

“Oh, sorry – I thought everyone had gone.”

“Sorry,” Christopher replied, clutching a book, “I just wanted to say... Merry Christmas.”

Remus felt an awkward twist of relief and guilt in his midsection. Poor Christopher.

“Thanks – Merry Christmas to you, too. Big plans?”

The younger boy shrugged,

“Just family. You?”

“Staying here.”

“Oh. Not by yourself?”

“Um... Sirius Black is staying too.”

“Of course. I heard about the stuff with his family.”

“Mm.” Remus did not want to talk about Sirius with Christopher at all, but least of all about the Black family. Christopher was pureblood too, and likely knew more than Sirius was comfortable with.

“Well,” Christopher made to stand, “See you in January, I s’pose.”

“Wait!” Remus said, quickly, reaching out but not touching him. Christopher stood up, but looked down on Remus, his eyes hopeful, Remus looked down, “I’m sorry about the way I spoke to you before the summer. I was a right git.”

Christopher did not dispute this. But he smiled,

“That’s all right. I hope it wasn’t something I... did?”

“No!” Remus shook his head, vehemently. He wished Christopher would sit down. “No, I promise, it was just me being a moody tosser. I had some other stuff going on, I shouldn’t have taken it out on you.”

“Ok. Well... thanks for saying so.”

Remus smiled, feeling a bit better. Christopher bit his lip, then said, “So... do you fancy a visit to Hogsmeade in the new year? The book shop has a January sale on, or we could just get a butterbeer.”

“Sorry, Chris, I can’t.” Remus felt horrible, and he saw Christopher’s face fall.

“Right. You’re probably going with Potter and Black and... what’s his face.”

“Peter. But I’m not – actually, I can’t go to Hogsmeade, I’m banned.”

“Oh. Really?”

“Really,” Remus nodded, earnestly, grateful that he didn’t have to lie.

“Is it to do with why you’re not a prefect anymore?”

“...Yeah.” Ok, that was a lie, but who was it hurting?

“Wow, ok.” Christopher raised his eyebrows and Remus wasn’t sure if he was impressed, or mildly concerned.

“Moonyyyyy!” Sirius’s voice wailed down the stairs from the boy’s dorms, “James is throwing snowballs at me, stop hiiiim!”

Remus laughed, and began getting up.

“Snowballs?” Christopher said, wryly, “In your bedroom?”

“They open the window and scrape it off the roof.”

“Help us, Moony!” Peter cried, “We need reinforcements!”

“I can’t believe you’re friends with that lot,” Christopher said, with a bristle of indignation, “They’re so immature.”

“So am I,” Remus shrugged, rolling up his sleeves and standing up, “I’m coming, lads!” He yelled at the top of his voice, marching towards the staircase.

* * *

Sunday 19th December 1976

It was a bitterly cold winter that year, and snow began to fall early over the castle. The marauders used this to great effect, and James perfected a spell which enabled the suits of armour which lined most of the classroom corridors to spit snowballs from their visors at various intervals. Remus liked the cold – or maybe he just liked wrapping up warm and sitting by the fire. In the winter at least no one asked why he wore long sleeves all the time.

And he was excited – maybe more excited than he had ever been for a Christmas holiday. He loved seeing the Potters, and he loved their house and their village, and being witness to a proper family for once. But to be alone with Sirius for an entire week; that was something he could never have imagined happening, even two months earlier.

They walked James and Peter down to the edge of the grounds – as far as Remus could go.

“You sure?” James asked, one last time, “Ferox never said you weren’t allowed, and Mum and Dad honestly wouldn’t mind at all...”

“Next year, hopefully,” Remus shrugged, “It might all be over by then. And I couldn’t live with myself if anything happened to your family because of *me*.”

“Black? You’re really going to say no to mum’s mince pies?”

“Ah, but I’m not, my dear Prongs,” Sirius grinned from behind his red and gold scarf, “She sent some ahead, first thing this morning. I’ve got an entire tin full.”

“Foiled again,” James smirked. He hugged Sirius, and then Remus, who was surprised by it. He couldn’t remember if they’d ever hugged before.

“Go on, get on the train, eh?” Sirius punched him in the shoulder, “You’ll have Evans all to yourself...”

James winked at him, then hurried away, Pete scurrying along behind him, waving to Remus and Sirius. The two boys staying behind stood there for a little while, watching the black cloaked students trudging through the pure white snow, all talking merrily about their plans for the break, the presents they looked forward to, and their eagerness to see their families.

“Seeya, Remus!” Christopher grinned at him, pink cheeked as he strolled past, “Have a good one!”

“You too,” Remus nodded, smiling back. He felt much better, now the air had been cleared.

“That kid again.” Sirius murmured, “Who is he?!”

“I’ve told you before, he’s a fifth year. In my study group.”

“Right. He looks like a complete drip.”

“He’s ok.” Remus smiled to himself, hoping Sirius didn’t notice.

A nasty voice came from behind them.

“What’s wrong, Potters kick you out too?”

Remus reached for his wand as they turned, and half expected to see Snape. He was surprised to find that it was Regulus Black standing there in the snow, face pinched with cold.

“No.” Sirius replied, hotly, “I’m just staying here this year.”

“*Why*?” Regulus asked, bluntly. He narrowed his eyes at his brother, as if waiting for the punchline.

“None of your business, that’s why. Now run along, little Reggie, I’m sure mummy’s waiting.”

Regulus tutted, and raised an eyebrow, as if to show that he would not rise to Sirius’s bait. Remus

hated it, and clenched his fists, which Regulus either saw, or sensed, because he gave Remus a sharp look, and Remus knew he was remembering their last altercation back in January. The younger boy visibly steeled himself, then spoke directly to Remus,

“Not a prefect any more, Loony Lupin? I wonder why? Something to do with my delinquent brother, perhaps? Surely that greasy half-blood Severus wasn’t telling the truth..?”

Remus might have swung for him, if he wasn’t busy stopping Sirius from doing the same. They struggled together in the snow, Sirius snarling,

“Take that back you brown nosing little--”

Fortunately, Remus was stronger. Regulus walked off, cackling, towards Hogsmeade and the train.

“I can curse him from here.” Sirius growled, once Remus let him go.

“I’d rather you didn’t,” Remus replied. He turned back to the snow-capped castle, “Look,” he encouraged, “We’ve got it practically to ourselves.”

“Yeah,” Sirius said, distracted, still shooting glanced back at his brother’s footsteps, “C’mon then, let’s go in. Freezing my bollocks off.”

His bad mood lasted until lunch time, when they went down to the Great Hall.

“Blimey.” Sirius said, as they entered the room. It was almost completely empty, with only three students – a Slytherin seventh year and two Ravenclaw sixth years – seated at the same table, at the head of the room.

“I reckon it’s the war,” Remus whispered, as they approached the table, “Parents want their kids home this Christmas.”

“Just you and me, then, Moony,” Sirius grinned, “The orphans of Gryffindor tower.”

Despite the small party, the hall had been decked out in silver and gold, with glistening streamers hanging like angel hair from every rafter, a dazzling tree that seemed to glow from somewhere within its branches, and a flock of jolly red-breasted robins enchanted to circle the room and whistle familiar Christmas tunes. Remus thought that Flitwick had really outdone himself, this year.

Sirius sat beside him, rather than across from him, as usual. They didn’t make much conversation with the rest of the party; the two Ravenclaws were obsessively quizzing each other on Arithmancy, and the Slytherin was deep in conversation with Professor Slughorn.

“Remember first year?” Sirius said, as the food appeared – the house elves clearly weren’t breaking for Christmas, “It was just you and me for Christmas then, too.”

“Yeah,” Remus smiled at his Shepherd’s Pie, warmed by the memory. He had spent every Christmas with Sirius since he was eleven. “*Electric Warrior*.”

“We’ll have to have a listen, later.”

They did, too. They stretched out on the rug in front of the fireplace and lay on their backs, playing the album at full volume. Sirius played *Monolith* twice because he knew it was Remus’s favourite, and Remus tolerated three replays of *Jeepster* for Sirius’s sake.

You slide so good,

With bones so fair,

You've got the universe reclining in your hair,

Cuz you're my babe...

Full, warm and content, Remus quietly drifted to sleep to the sound of Marc Bolan's pretty voice and twanging guitar. He woke up a little later, with a sore back. He turned his head and found he was alone on the carpet, and the record had stopped playing. Sitting up stiffly, Remus looked around for Sirius, who was seated a little way away, curled up in an arm chair, whispering into his compact mirror.

Remus relaxed, leaning back on his elbows and watched gently for a while, the firelight warming Sirius's features with a fine glow, softening his sharper angles into supple grecian marble. He was so achingly beautiful. Obviously everybody knew that, Sirius's beauty wasn't just for Remus, but sometimes it felt like it was. It had nothing to do with wanting Sirius, then, it was something much more. It drove Remus crazy.

Eventually, Sirius whispered a goodbye to the mirror and snapped it closed. He smiled at Remus, and slowly unfurled, stretching his long limbs out over the sides of the armchair. Remus watched, unmoving,

"How's James?"

"Fine," Sirius replied, that look growing in his eyes that Remus had come to recognise as a signal that something wonderful about to happen. Sirius got up from the chair and sauntered over to Remus. "Misses me, obviously."

"Obviously," Remus said, repeating without listening, just watching Sirius's approach. He towered over him, the fire light now blazing across him like a flare, streaks of gold flickering in his pupils. He sank to his knees astride Remus's still prone body, and bent forward - not too far; not so far that Remus didn't have to stretch a little to close that extra space between them. He didn't mind. It was always worth the effort.

They were used to each other now – Remus had thought it had been good in the beginning, the very first time – but after a month of secretive exploration they had developed an intimate knowledge that Remus hadn't known you *could* have with another person. He felt as attuned to the various movements and reactions of Sirius's body as he was with his own. He knew the language in every gasp, or tightening, the code in his kisses, or the shapes Sirius traced on his own scarred skin.

It made the moment they parted all the more difficult, though. Sirius would be quiet at first, and Remus would just listen to his breathing, the hitch in his chest, the sighs of overwhelming calm. And he would wait for it.

The laugh, the cheeky grin, the slap on the thigh that told Remus it was over, and they were back to normal.

"Fancy a mince pie? I'm starving!"

There it was. Sirius leapt up, grabbing his jeans and wriggling into them, before waving his wand,

"*Accio* biscuit tin." the big royal blue tin came flying down the stairs and came at Sirius so hard it nearly knocked him over. "Oof."

“Your wandwork is too broad,” Remus said, buttoning his own trousers and pulling on a t-shirt. Too warm for a jumper.

Sirius tossed him a mince pie, sitting back in the armchair, then rubbed his knee, wincing.

“Carpet burn.”

“You should see my back.” Remus replied, as if they were discussing the weather. He settled into the sofa opposite Sirius.

They ate their pies quietly. When he finished, Sirius licked the sticky fruit off his fingers and brushed the crumbs from his torso.

“Aren’t you going to put you shirt back on?” Remus enquired, folding the tin from his pie into neat triangular portions.

“Nah. No one’s here.”

“Yeah, but still...” Remus made a fruitless gesture. Sirius smirked.

“Prude.”

Remus laughed, flicking the folded up tin at him.

“Tart.”

Sixth Year: Twelve Nights

Chapter Summary

CW for drug use (weed), drinking, smoking and sex (none graphic).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I sing with impertinence, shading impermanent chords with my words

I borrowed your time, and I'm sorry I called, but the thought just occurred

That we're nobody's children at all.

After all.

Thursday 20th December 1976

Sirius sang in the shower. Remus wasn't sure if this was a new thing, or whether he had been doing it for ages and Remus simply hadn't noticed – he'd typically been avoiding Sirius's showering times. Anyway, as Remus dressed, he listened and smiled. He didn't have a bad voice, really – nothing special, but in tune. He was obsessed with The Doors at the moment, and had perfected an imitation of Jim Morrison's deep American holler,

"C'mon, c'mon, c'mon now TOUCH ME BAAABE," he bellowed over the hissing of the taps. It might have been endearing, even alluring, if he didn't spoil it by singing along with the trumpets, too, "BA-DAH Ba-daah...!"

He exited the bathroom in a fog of steam, his skin flushed, his shirt damp from his hair. "What?" he cocked an eyebrow at Remus, "No applause?"

Remus rolled his eyes, opening the dorm room door,

"Hurry up, I'm starving..."

It felt weird to leave the isolation of Gryffindor tower, where they had already made themselves at home, and to enter the rest of the castle, where everything was the same. They were early to breakfast, and the two Ravenclaws, a girl and a boy, sat closer to them this time.

"Isn't it ridiculous that they serve this much food when there are only five students?" The girl, who had large cat-eye glasses and a mass of freckles, remarked, "It seems so wasteful..."

The plates in front of them had filled with fried eggs, bacon, sausages, black pudding, baked beans, fried tomatoes and toast – not to mention cereal, porridge and fruit juices.

"Nah," Sirius replied, watching Remus pile up his plate, "You've clearly never seen Moony here eat."

“Shut up.” Remus replied, his mouth already full.

Still, the Ravenclaws watched, fascinated, until Remus was too embarrassed to eat any more. Fortunately, at that moment a distraction arrived in the form of the morning post owls. One landed in front of Remus. Three in front of Sirius.

“You’re popular.” The Ravenclaw boy leaned over. He was skinny and smallish, with a beaky nose.

“Don’t encourage him.” Remus said. His own package was soft, and wrapped in lavender coloured paper. It was from Lily, he had no doubt. Sirius had five or six brightly coloured envelopes – none red, Remus noted with relief. No howlers from Walpurga this year.

“We’re going ice skating before lunch,” the Ravenclaw girl smiled, brightly, “The lake’s frozen over. Want to come?”

“Sounds good,” Sirius nodded, tossing his unopened post aside. Remus collected it up before they left the breakfast table, and took it up to the room with them.

“Are these all Christmas cards?!” He asked, flicking through.

“Oh, yeah, I think so.” Sirius shrugged, opening his wardrobe and rummaging through the bottom, pulling out drawers and old shoes he didn’t wear any more.

“Who are they from?”

“Whoever.”

Remus frowned, then caught sight of something on Sirius’s bedside table. Another pile of unopened cards. He started opening them. Sirius clearly wasn’t interested.

‘Dear Sirius, have a wonderful Christmas, lots of kisses, Imelda.’

Hm.

‘To the boy who holds my heart, merry Christmas and all my love, S.’

...

‘Darling Sirius, please meet me in Hogsmeade under the mistletoe for a kiss... and maybe more? Emmeline.’

‘My raven haired prince, I cannot rest until I am in your arms...’

“Sirius.”

“What?” Came his muffled response. He was half buried in the back of his wardrobe now, on his hands and knees.

“These are all from girls...”

“Aha!” He finally reappeared, leaning back on his ankles, holding a pair of ice skates aloft, “I knew I brought a pair during first year.”

“Are you telling me your feet haven’t grown since you were eleven?”

“They have a growing charm on them,” Sirius explained, dusting them off, “They get bigger to fit me. Only the best for the Blacks!”

“Clever. These cards, though...”

“Oh, those? What’d you open them for? You want to be careful. One of them squirted perfume at me. *Perfume*.” He pulled a face.

“Are these all girls you’ve...?”

“Really, Moony, I’m flattered. As legendary as I’m sure my stamina is, *no*. They’re just girls. They send me nonsense all the time.”

“All the time?”

“Oh c’mon, what are you, jealous?” Sirius ruffled Remus’s hair, “They’re just cards.”

“I suppose...”

“Now, let’s get you some skates...”

“I don’t want any, I’ll break my neck.”

“You’ll be fine, I’ll show you how to do it.”

Remus picked up the pile again and flicked through it.

“There must be twenty here, altogether...”

“Look, Remus, why don’t we find *you* a girlfriend, then you won’t be so interested in *my* love life.”

“What?!” Remus stared at Sirius. He was being quite genuine, a look of mild concern on his face. Remus’s heart sank. *Really?*

“Yeah, I reckon that freckly Ravenclaw likes you. Or Marlene! What about Marlene? She’s pretty, nice. Likes you.”

“She offered to snog me once,” Remus said, but shook his head, “It was a joke though – Marlene’s not interested in me. I don’t need a girlfriend.”

“Don’t knock it ‘til you’ve tried it,” Sirius winked, “Right, let’s see what we can do about these skates...”

Ice-skating was marginally better than flying a broom, but not much. The lake was completely frozen, but Remus couldn’t shake the thought it might crack at any moment, and kept patting his pocket to check he could reach his wand. Sirius, obviously, was a natural. So was the Ravenclaw boy – Arnold – and the pair of them were soon racing each other up and down the length of the ice. Remus watched them, nervously, trying not to wobble.

“Here,” the freckly girl – Tina – glided over to him, smiling kindly, “Put your hands on my shoulders if you want, and watch my feet,”

He did so, gratefully, standing behind her as she dragged him steadily around in a small circle. He thought he was getting the hang of it.

“I wonder if the squid’s ok...” he said, after they’d been a bit too quiet for a while.

“Ugh, I never even thought about that. Does it hibernate, do you think?” Tina peered down at the ice with some interest, “I don’t think I’ve actually ever read anything about the squid.”

“Me neither.” Remus replied, letting go of her shoulders and attempting to do a few meters unaided. “Professor Ferox liked it, though, I saw him feeding it once.”

“Really?” She looked up at him, earnest and curious, “What did he feed it?”

Remus shrugged,

“No idea. Something nasty looking.”

“I miss Ferox,” she sighed, “He really brought his lessons to life. I ended up dropping Care of Magical Creatures. Taking an extra course in Goblin Finance, instead.”

“Oh, that sounds... er... interesting.”

“It is,” she nodded, without a trace of irony, “I can lend you a book, if you like?”

“Er... thanks...”

After lunch, Remus and Sirius returned to the tower. Remus noticed that the pile of cards had disappeared, but he didn’t mention it. He lit the small bedroom fire and looked for a thicker jumper to wear,

“Still cold?” Sirius asked, yawning.

“Freezing.” Remus replied, pulling on a second pair of socks and raising his hands to the fire.

“Should have moved about a bit more, gets the blood pumping. Still,” his tone changed; turned sly and teasing, “You had a nice chat with freckles?”

“Tina. She’s interested in Goblin Finance.”

“Excellent, you can marry rich.”

Remus threw a slipper at him.

“Oi!” Sirius barked with laughter, “I’m just trying to help you get out a bit, Moony, you ought to have other interests outside of that bloody study group.”

“I think, if anything, I would be doing *more* studying if I started going out with Tina. Which I’m not going to.” Remus blew into his cupped hands, then held them up to the fire again. The cold just seemed to seep in and settle there.

He turned to look at Sirius, who was leaning against his headboard, staring. His lips curled into a wicked smile.

“Bed’s warm...”

* * *

Friday 21st December 1976

“Bloody Regulus.”

“It was two days ago, get over it.”

“He’s such a prick.”

“I know. Left a bit!”

“I can’t go any further left, there’s no room.”

“Careful! Not there...”

“Oops. Anyway, you should have let me hit him.”

“You weren’t going to hit him, you were going to break a knuckle. You can’t punch.”

“Yes I can!”

“No, you can’t. Look, can you please concentrate? You keep missing.”

“I’ve punched loads of people – oops, sorry...”

“You’ve play-fought with James. Not the same thing.”

“Oh, and *you* know how to punch, do you Moony?”

“Yeah, I do, actually – aha, I win!”

“It’s not fair. Can’t we get closer?”

“No, that’s cheating.”

“Oh fine, I forgot you were a stickler for rules, *Prefect Lupin...*”

Remus folded his arms and let Sirius rant. He had won fair and square. They’d been playing this new game for about two hours now, and Remus was by far the best at it. He had never beaten Sirius at anything on the first go. It was an excellent feeling, and he was going to lord it over him.

The game involved levitating various items they’d found in the common room – gobstones, chocolate frogs, quills, slippers – and firing them at speed through the ‘goals’, constructed by cutting various sized holes in Peter and James’s bedsheets, which they had strung up across the common room, dividing it. (Remus *had* had reservations about cutting up his friend’s sheets out of boredom. But Sirius had reasoned that they couldn’t very well cut holes in their *own* bedsheets, which were in use.)

The best part was that they never had to tidy up. Once they had got everything through the goals, all they needed to do was walk through the sheets and start again on the other side. This they began to do now, crossing to the half of the room with the fireplace in it. It was cosy.

“I wonder if this is what camping is like,” Remus said, thoughtfully.

“Never been.” Sirius replied. “James thought it was funny our family never did it.”

“I always wanted to.” Remus mused, beginning to levitate a crystal ball someone had carelessly let roll under the couch. “But I liked the idea of anywhere that wasn’t St. Edmund’s.”

He frowned, slightly, having surprised himself. Why had he brought up St. Edmund’s? He never talked about it in front of anyone at Hogwarts. Sirius didn’t seem fazed.

“Yeah, I don’t blame you.” He said, then, glancing at the floating crystal ball, “You’re going to smash that.”

“No I’m not, I’m aiming at the big settee.” Remus demonstrated, reeling back his wand and then flicking it, sending the crystal ball whizzing through the very smallest hole, landing with a quiet ‘thump’ on the other side. Remus smirked at Sirius, who, shook his head in disbelief.

“It’s scary how good at this you are. Get you on a broom and you’d make a bloody good chaser.”

“No, thanks. Your go.”

Sirius selected a gobstone. They were easier to levitate, but much harder to aim. He was terrible at understanding his own limits.

“Did you play that muggle game, at St Edmund’s?” Sirius asked, casually, firing the gobstone too hard and missing the sheet altogether, sending it over the top.

“Foul.” Remus said, “What muggle game?”

“With all the running about and kicking. We saw them playing it when we... er, over the summer.”

“Oh. Football. No, I never liked it. Had too many bruises already.”

“Yeah, sorry, I didn’t think. Of course.” Sirius went a bit quiet after that. Remus knew him well enough to recognise that he was building up to something - a question, or a declaration. In the meantime, Remus started shooting quills like darts through each hole in the sheets. Finally, Sirius had gathered up whatever courage he needed, or prepared whichever words. “Is it really awful, living there?”

Remus lowered his wand. He hadn’t ever complained about St Edmund’s - not in front of the marauders, or anyone, except for Grant, because Grant *knew*. He was about to say ‘Nah, it’s fine, really’, and shrug it off - but something stopped him. That was a lie, and there was no need to lie, just now.

“It’s... not awful, but it is... noisy. You always have to watch your back, and no one really cares about you, much. They have to make sure you don’t die, or get arrested, or starve or whatever, but they don’t actually *care*.”

He wasn’t in the mood to play any more. he reached into his back pocket and pulled out his cigarettes, lighting one with his wand tip, then tossing the box to Sirius. Sirius just held it, running his thumb over a loose bit of foil poking out from the join in the hinge.

“I know how that feels,” he murmured. That was all he said, and it was enough, at the time. He quickly looked up and grinned, “Look what I can do!”

He slid a cigarette out of the packer and placed it between his lips. A look of concentration flashed in his eyes for a moment, then he snapped his fingers, and the cigarette lit itself. His grin widened around the fag, and he looked at Remus for praise.

“Blimey,” Remus smiled, “Clever you.”

* * *

Saturday 22nd December 1976

“What are you doing?”

“What’s it look like?” Remus replied sternly, over the top of his textbook. He’d spent a peaceful few hours all by himself in bed, until Sirius had marched in smelling of snow and hot chocolate. He’d gone ice skating again, and Remus had begged off this time, looking for some quiet.

“You’re not studying at Christmas?!” Sirius flopped down beside him on the bed, looking scandalised.

“It’s not Christmas, it’s not even Christmas eve, it’s just a normal day. And I like reading, thank you very much.” Remus shifted away from him, rolling back and raising the book over his head to read.

“How times have changed, eh Moony?” Sirius chortled, pulling off his socks and thick woollen jumper.

It was one the Potters had bought him - this year Sirius’s clothes had been much more practical and comfortable than before - hardly anything specially tailored or finely cut now. He was still very obviously an aristocrat, born and bred - that was clear in his bearing, in every enunciated phrase he spoke. But he was happier, and that showed just as much. “I remember a boy who hated reading, and homework, and--”

“Mm, and I remember someone who loved it, and came top in every subject...” Remus turned to him, finally. “What happened, didn’t like the competition?”

“Pfft. I could run rings around the lot of you, if I wanted to.” This wasn’t a boast. Sirius had always been exceptional when it came to intuitive magic, and intensely diligent at research - when it suited him.

“So why don’t you?”

“Rather do other stuff,” he shrugged.

The conversation had hit a dead end - that hardly ever happened with Sirius, unless you brought up his family. And this certainly had something to do with the Blacks - or at least Sirius thought it did. They wanted him to be in Slytherin, so he ended up in Gryffindor. They wanted him to be a good pureblood heir, so he befriended the Potters and ran away. They wanted him to get the best marks in his exams to prove that purebloods were better than anyone else - so he used his talents exclusively in ways that would annoy them.

Remus returned to his book. Two lines down, Sirius gave a long sigh.

“I’m *bored*.”

“Go and play chess with the dynamic duo.” Remus replied, re-reading the second line.

“Ugh, not that bored. Spent all morning with them. They’re ok, but merlin, everything’s so *literal*.”

“Talk to James then.”

“He’s got family visiting, or something. We’re talking after dinner. Anyway, not in the mood for talking.”

Remus put down his book.

“Oh?”

“I don’t want to disturb you, though.” Sirius said, innocently, edging closer.

“It can wait.”

* * *

Sunday 23rd December 1976

“Show me how to throw a punch, then?”

“Seriously?!” Remus sighed,

“*Deadly* Sirius.” The other boy waggled his eyebrows. Remus groaned. “Oh, go on,” Sirius laughed at his face, “Show me! Teach me something, Professor Lupin.”

They were lounging in their pyjamas, in the common room. Gryffindor tower was still being cleaned nightly by the house elves, but the funny little creatures had had the sense to leave up the ‘goal’ sheets, even if they’d tidied away all of the projectiles. The effect was that of a weird screen blocking out the windows on the other side, except for five pools of winter sunlight which streamed in through the cut out holes.

“Ok, but you need something to hit that you won’t hurt yourself on.”

They ended up finding an empty bit of wall and performing a softening charm on it. Sirius stood there, eagerly, awaiting instruction. “Make a fist.” Remus said. “No, ok, not like that... yeah, put your thumb there, unless you want it broken. Ok, now you want it at shoulder level... yeah, then... er...”

Remus eventually resorted to demonstrating a few times on the wall, before physically repositioning Sirius’s arms in order to get the angle right, “Legs apart, don’t lean forward so much... ok, try it now...”

It took about twenty minutes, but in the end Remus deemed Sirius at least competent enough to give a black eye.

“Where’d you learn this?” Sirius panted, elated with his success.

“St Edmund’s.”

“Oh, yeah...” He ducked his head.

“No, not like that,” Remus shook his head quickly, realising that Sirius was probably imagining him squaring off against a group of huge, tough muggles. “Some of the older boys taught me, a few summers ago. They were all a bit rough, liked a fight, but they were nice to me.”

“Ah,” Sirius’s eyes gleamed with the light of understanding, “Was this the year you began your foray into organised crime?”

“My what?! Oh, yeah, the fags. Yep, that summer.”

“I’ll never forget you stomping onto the train in those boots.”

“Ugh, don’t,” Remus covered his eyes with his hands. He cringed every time he remembered the way he had acted, “I was so obnoxious.”

“I didn’t think so. Anyway, you had good reason.” Sirius rubbed his knuckles. They looked red from hitting the wall so many times, and Remus fought the urge to take Sirius’s hand in his own and kiss every finger. “Did you, er... ever learn anymore about Greyback?” Sirius asked, tentatively, snapping Remus out of his daze.

“Yeah, bits and pieces.” He didn’t want to clam up, but he did anyway, sitting down again and picking up a newspaper, just to have something to hold.

“Moony, I know you hate talking about him. It.”

“No, it’s fine.” He wasn’t fooling anyone.

“You don’t think... the attacks over the last few months...”

Remus looked up at him, just to check his expression. He looked anxious, but not frightened. At least, not of Remus.

“Yeah,” he confirmed with a curt nod, “It was him. Moody told me.”

“Shit.”

“Yeah. Shit.”

“You don’t think he’d come after you?”

“Don’t see why he would.” The barefaced lie should have shocked him, or at least caused a pang of guilt. But this was justified, Remus told himself, this was to protect his friends. He touched the scar on his side over the top of his pyjamas. The fabric was thin, and if he pressed lightly he could feel the dimples and puckers in his flesh made by those dreadful teeth. “It’s not like he can do anything else to me now. The worst’s already happened.”

“Moony.”

It wasn’t a question or a request, and they both let it hang in the air.

* * *

Monday 24th December 1976

“Do we have any weed?” Sirius asked as they walked back from breakfast on Christmas Eve. They’d dodged yet another chess tournament with the Ravenclaws. Remus didn’t actually mind the idea, but Sirius had decided they were intensely boring and not to be tolerated.

“When you say ‘we’,” Remus replied, dryly, “Do you mean me?”

“Fine, do *you* have any weed?”

“No.”

“But you know where some is.”

“Maybe.”

“That’s my little delinquent. C’mon then, show me.”

Remus sighed,

“We’d have to go outside, to the greenhouses - and probably smoke it there too, I don’t want the house elves getting a whiff. It’s too cold, I’d rather not.”

“Come on, Moony. You haven’t been outside in ages!”

“I know, that was deliberate.”

“Come on.” Sirius was dragging him by the sleeve now, and because there wasn’t much else to do, and he did quite fancy a spliff, Remus allowed it. They summoned their cloaks and left the castle, hurrying through the thinning sheet of snow down to the greenhouses. Behind them, buried in a tin box, Remus unearthed the illicit buds, wrapped up in twists of brown paper. He would have to pay back whoever it belonged to - if they found out, of course.

The greenhouses themselves had no snow on the roofs; being warm enough inside.

“We could go in there?” Sirius suggested, shivering.

“Are you mental? Spout comes down here twice a day to check on the mandrakes. It has to be somewhere else.”

“The shack?”

“Fuck that.” Remus growled, without thinking. Sirius looked at him, surprised, and he shook his head, apologetically, “I hate it there. Please, somewhere else?”

“Ok, sorry... er... ooh, I know!” He grabbed Remus by the wrist this time, his ungloved hand still miraculously warm.

Remus worked out where they were going before they got there - and it was actually sort of brilliant. They were just approaching the statue of the hump-backed, one-eyed witch, when the seventh year Slytherin student turned a corner at the other end of the hallway. They stopped still, probably looking extremely guilty.

“What are you two doing?” He asked, tilting his head, weighing them up.

“Just going for a stroll.” Sirius replied, haughtily, “It’s a free castle.”

“Whatever.” The Slytherin rolled his eyes, bored. He kept walking past them, robes sweeping. Remus pulled out the map, as soon as he was out of sight, and watched the little dot with his name keep on towards the library. *Perseus Flint*.

“Bleugh,” Sirius pulled a face when he saw it, “I think he’s a relative...”

They entered the secret passage, cast an illuminating spell and rolled up their cloaks so that they could sit comfortably on the stone floor.

“Should have brought the record player,” Sirius said, “We could get quite comfy here, dunno why I never thought of it before.”

“You and your cave-dwelling fantasies,” Remus humoured him, laying out all of his paraphernalia. He liked rolling, it was a pleasant process. “We’re *not* spending the rest of Christmas in here.”

They did spend the next few hours there, though, minds drifting, murmuring stupid jokes to each other or humming half-remembered songs. By lunchtime they were ravenous, and giggled all the way to the Great Hall. Sirius was red eyed, pale, with an inane grin, and Remus knew he wasn’t

much better off. He was just thankful Dumbledore wasn't there; he'd see through them in an instant.

They were wrangled into a game of chess after lunch, once the table had been cleared, and Sirius actually became very competitive in his attempt to beat Tina, who must have been the reigning Ravenclaw champion. Remus was finding it difficult to concentrate, himself, and eventually lay his head down on the table and fell into a deep sleep.

He was nudged awake about an hour later.

"You're snoring, Moony." Sirius chuckled.

"Are you all right?" Tina asked, her inquisitive face peering across the chess board. She had won, it seemed.

"Hmm? Oh, yeah..." he tried to sit upright, feeling a twinge in his back as he did so. "Sorry, must not have slept enough last night."

"You do look quite pale," she continued. Her eyes raked over him analytically, "Perhaps you ought to go to bed for a bit? Sirius said you were busy all morning on Herbology, so I'm not surprised if you're tired."

Sirius began to giggle, compulsively, and Remus elbowed him hard in the ribs.

"Yeah, I will go for a lie down, cheers."

He went back to the tower slowly, at first in case Sirius decided to follow him, and then because his hip hurt from sleeping in a stupid position. His head was clearer, and he decided to take a hot bath, to see if that would help at all. He took his Arithmancy textbook into the bathroom with him, hoping it would stop him from falling asleep again.

He'd only been in the water for ten minutes when Sirius's voice broke into the dorm room,

"Moony?"

"I'm in the bath." He called back. The door opened, Remus tutted, "Didn't say you could come in..."

"Nothing I haven't seen." Sirius replied, archly. Remus blinked - was Sirius actually commenting on the recent turn their relationship had taken, or was this just another off handed remark? Perhaps he talked to James in the bath. Remus wouldn't be surprised. Sirius leaned casually against the sink, "James gave me the password to the prefect's baths, if you'd rather go there?"

"I'm fine here, thanks."

"Ok. I've had an idea."

"Does it involve smoking weed in a tunnel?"

"Yes."

"Brilliant."

"Not just that, though - I fancy an outing."

"Do you?" Remus smirked, closing his eyes and leaning back. *Here we go...*

“How does the Hog’s Head sound?”

Remus opened his eyes.

“It sounds completely mad.”

“Excellent!” Sirius grinned, “We’ll go after dinner, then.”

Remus made half-hearted attempts to change Sirius’s mind, but when a plan had been concocted, it was generally pretty much set in stone. Particularly if it involved breaking school rules.

“I’m not allowed into Hogsmeade...”

“Moony, it’s *Christmas Eve*.”

So they went. After sharing a long joint in the tunnel (at the Honeyduke’s end, obviously - Remus didn’t fancy being stoned for the long walk through the passage), they crept up into the sweet shop (pocketing a few chocolate frogs on the way) and out into the dark, empty high street.

The Three Broomsticks was the only place that looked at all welcoming - but Sirius reckoned Rosmerta might shop them to McGonagall if she saw them in there.

“Which would be total bollocks,” he huffed, “I’m *seventeen*, I should be allowed to do what I like.”

The Hog’s Head was not nearly as inviting as the Three Broomsticks, but it still had a kind of atmosphere. The clientele were private, huddled in groups talking amongst themselves, and the barman surly, but he served Sirius and Remus without question, and they were able to find a table and stools without too much of a problem. There was an odd smell hanging about the place - something Remus liked a lot, but couldn’t quite place. It stirred a strange sort of wanting inside him, which he tried to drown in whisky.

They drank a lot, and quickly, caught up in each other’s overexcitement.

“I haven’t had a drink since Halloween.” Remus said, daringly.

“Ugh, I was so sick that night,” Sirius laughed, “I don’t even remember half of it.”

“I do.” Remus bristled. Sirius caught his look and the smile fell from his face. His brows knit and he looked down at his half empty goblet,

“Of course I remember that part, Remus.”

He felt a bit guilty after that. A small part of him still wanted to punish Sirius for the hurt he’d caused, even if, on the whole, he wanted to forget it all and just be happy. Alcohol is fortunately the ideal solution for this particular problem. At least, Remus thought so. He smiled broadly,

“First time I got pissed,” he drained his glass, “Was that summer I got the boots and all that gear - I got so off my head I thought I was going to die.”

“I got tipsy at a family banquet when I was thirteen,” Sirius mused, ordering two more cups with a snap of his fingers, “But not as drunk as I got for your birthday that year... still, it was all the same to Mother, and out came the wand...”

He made a wide, slashing movement with his own wand hand, and imitated his mother’s sharp, precise voice, “A Black heir shows proper comportment at all times,” *slash, slash*.

Remus winced, thinking about Sirius's calves. Sirius glanced at him sideways, mid-slash, "Sorry," he said, folding his arms as the whiskies arrived, "It's not funny, I dunno why I act like it is."

"You're out, now," Remus said, seriously, "You don't ever have to go back."

"Yeah," Sirius slurred, slouching in his seat, "It's all Reg's mess now. Nasty little so and so - d'you know how many times I took the blame for him? How many times I stood between... he used to be a proper little crybaby, but Mother hates crying, she says it makes men sissies, it makes them - well, whatever, some bollocks, but anyway, Reg would cry, and I would do something worse to distract her, and then she'd do her thing," *slash, slash*. His eyes were bright and his cheeks were pink, "Y'know if either of us had just learnt not to get upset, then maybe... but I s'pose Reg learnt, in the end, cold hearted fucker."

He took a big gulp. "Sorry, I shouldn't moan. 'Specially not to you. You know all about my bloody lack of self-control."

It took Remus a moment or two to realise that Sirius was talking about the Snape incident. He didn't want to talk about that, the conversation was melancholy enough as it was, and he knew what happened when you let the drink get you down.

"S'fine," he mumbled, "Probably a good thing, anyway. I hardly ever cry, I think I lost the ability at some point. Maybe I'm like Reg."

"You are *not* like Reg," Sirius said, vehemently, squeezing Remus's knee. Remus smiled at him, dopily, and Sirius withdrew his hand quickly, looking around furtively in case the gesture had been noticed.

"Can you smell that?" Remus asked, feeling very drunk now. He stretched like a cat. It was so familiar, so deep and fascinating – like prey, or... no, it was just out of reach.

"Stale beer? BO?" Sirius suggested, making himself laugh.

"No, it's an animal or something..."

"Sorry, mate," he shrugged, "I could turn into a dog and have a sniff, but I think I'm too drunk to remember how to turn back..."

They left the pub, shortly after that. The scent had infected Remus, unshakable and overwhelmingly desirable, he felt more than drunk - almost wolfish. He transferred this feeling to Sirius, and pushed him against the wall in the darkness of an alleyway, kissing him fiercely, pressing his hips against him. Eventually Sirius had to push him away, using more force than normal,

"Hey," he whispered, "Not here, someone'll see..."

They dragged each other back to Honeyduke's, through the door and into the cellar - which Remus would have been more than happy with, but Sirius wouldn't touch him again until they were inside the dark, dank tunnel. They hadn't been together like this before after drinking - and neither of them had the presence of mind to light their wands, so it was pitch black, but Remus was hot with the whisky and Sirius was just as eager as him now they were alone, and it was the same as it had been, only better, more urgent and fluid and messy, and Remus felt a surge of courage, before pulling away and sinking to his knees, holding Sirius in place, and it was nerve-wracking, but *god*, so worth it to hear that surprised gasp,

"What are you...? - oh!"

Christmas Day 1976

As was to be expected, both boys awoke on Christmas Day with thumping hangovers.

“Tell me there’s a cure, Moony,” Sirius wailed from his bed, “You’re the one taking healing lessons...”

“*You’re* the one taking Potions,” Remus grumbled from under his pillow. “Pain is a potion thing, I do cuts and abrasions.”

“Useless.”

“Shut up.”

But it was no good, he was awake now, and there was nothing either of them could do about it. He clambered out from his bedsheets, head thudding at twice the tempo as he hobbled across the room to the bathroom. “Cold shower,” he mumbled at Sirius’s bed, “Then breakfast. Fried eggs, trust me.”

They couldn't face opening presents and left it, instead stumbling down to eat, without combing their hair or making much effort to look smart at all. Dumbledore was there, and smiled at them benevolently as they took their seats at the table,

“Happy Christmas, one and all!” He boomed, cheerily, apparently oblivious to Sirius and Remus’s wincing.

Breakfast did improve things, somewhat - at least it settled their stomachs, and they eagerly returned to the tower afterwards to open presents. Remus got the usual assortment of quills, chocolates, books and knitwear as usual, and was very pleased to receive them. Nothing from Matron this year - he supposed she’d decided to cut ties early, seeing as after his seventeenth birthday he would not be expected to return to St. Edmund’s. He pushed that thought down with a cigarette.

James got in touch shortly after that, through the compact mirrors, and they both wished him a merry Christmas,

“Are you two ok?” He frowned up through the glass, “You look a bit peaky.”

“Hungover,” Sirius grunted.

“Jealous.” James replied.

“Weirdo.” Said Remus.

Afterwards, he took a nap, still worn out from the night before, and woke up in time for lunch - which, in Remus’s opinion, was basically a perfect Christmas Day.

Boxing Day 1976

“Why’s it called boxing day, anyway?”

“Nobody knows,” Remus yawned over his porridge, “It’s one of the great mysteries of life.”

“Must be a muggle thing. I’ll ask my muggle studies professor.”

“*You* do muggle studies?” The Slytherin, Flint, was staring down the table at him.

Sirius threw two fingers up at him, then turned his back, ignoring him. Remus kept eating, the brown sugar melting on his tongue. Their knees were bumping under the table and it was delightful.

Suddenly, the owls arrived, screeching into the hall with an unusual urgency. There were more than usual, as well. Remus realised that Dumbledore and McGonagall were not at breakfast. Tina, sitting opposite, got her post first and opened it.

“It’s from mum...” her eyes widened and she got up from the table at once, hurrying away out of the hall. Flint did the same, then Arnold.

“What’s going on?” Remus asked, as Flitwick sighed heavily, shaking his head. He passed the two remaining boys a copy of *The Daily Prophet*. They leaned in together to read it.

‘*MUGGLES ATTACKED IN CHRISTMAS CRISIS*’ blared the headline.

“Last night, while thousands slept safely in their beds on Christmas night, over one hundred muggles all over Britain were attacked in their homes. The Auror’s office confirmed this morning that the attacks were magical in nature, and intended to cause harm.

The attacks took place in a number of locations, apparently targeting families with ties to the wizarding world - those with magical relatives or a history of muggle-magical relations. Offences range from minor jinxes to - in some cases - the use of unforgivable curses. There are no suspects at present. The minister for Magic is expected to make a statement later today.”

Professor McGonagall arrived while they were reading, with Flint, Tina and Arnold in toe. Tina looked as though she had been crying. Flint was scowling miserably.

“You’ve all heard the news.” The professor said, her voice thinner than usual; strained and tired. “If your parents have requested that you return home, then we will make arrangements at once to ensure you arrive safely.”

“Is there anything we can do, Professor?” Sirius stood up, frowning. Flint rolled his eyes.

“No, Mr Black, thank you. Simply stay calm and carry on as normal.”

“Please, Professor Flitwick,” Tina sobbed, “I need to go home *now*, it’s my auntie...” Arnold put his arm around her shoulder, and whispered something comforting.

“C’mon, Moony,” Sirius murmured, “Let’s see if James knows anything...”

“I don’t know anything!” James said, almost as soon as he opened the mirror to respond to their calling. “Dad’s gone to the ministry with Moody, they let me read the paper, but there’s nothing else. Everyone knows who did it, though - death eaters.”

Sirius nodded, gravely.

“Voldemort?” Remus asked, “Does he have that many followers? Over a hundred, the paper said, all over the country, in one night...”

“Must be more than anyone thought.” James said.

“Well,” Sirius sat up, his mouth a grim line, “My family alone would account for at least twenty.”

“They’re *not* your family,” James said, fiercely. He and Sirius stared each other out for a while, and Remus shifted away, slightly, feeling intrusive. Sirius’s temper was rising, Remus didn’t need enhanced senses to work that out.

“If Reg was one of them, I’ll...”

“Black!” James hissed, “No one knows who *any* of them were. Calm down, ok? Moony, you there?”

“Yeah,” Remus shuffled back into the mirror’s view. James looked at him,

“Don’t let him be a twat about this, right?”

“What do you want *me* to do?!” Remus asked, nonplussed. Sirius’s family crises were usually James’s job. Remus’s role was different.

“Just distract him!”

Remus personally didn’t think that that sounded like the best idea. It wouldn’t get rid of the problem - and James almost definitely wouldn’t approve of Remus’s distraction techniques. Sirius talked to James for a bit longer, and Remus left them to it. He thought longingly about the final joint, sitting in his bedside table upstairs. Probably not appropriate.

* * *

Thursday 27th December 1976

Arnold, Tina and Flint went home on Boxing Day, so after that it was just the two of them (and the teachers, of course, but they seemed to be in a never-ending conference, McGonagall’s face growing more and more weary every time Remus saw her).

Sirius sulked. He didn’t want to go out, he didn’t want to stay in. He didn’t want to smoke, or drink, or eat, or play games. He just wanted to stew. Remus would have been quite content to let him, if only it didn’t affect the entire atmosphere of the castle so much.

He tried James’s distraction idea.

“Want to play that game?”

“Nah, I’m rubbish at it.”

“Yeah, but I’m not.”

“You play it, then.” He hunched down into his chair, arms folded. Remus sighed,

“Want to go out on your broom? I’ll go with you and everything.”

“Don’t have my broom here.”

“We can borrow them from the shed. Hooch won’t mind.”

“Nah, don’t like using other people’s brooms.”

“Snob.”

No response.

“Chess?”

“Boring.”

“Homework?”

That was just met with a dark look.

“Want a blow job?”

“Bloody *hell*, Moony!”

“What?! I’m running out of options, *jesus*. Just trying to cheer you up.”

“I don’t want to cheer up.”

“Yes, that much is clear.” He fiddled with a loose thread on his sleeve, “Do you want to go to the Potters?”

Sirius looked up,

“What?”

“I don’t mind,” Remus said, honestly. “If you need to see them. If you... need James.”

For a moment, Remus wasn’t sure what Sirius was going to do. He seemed to consider the idea, and Remus wished he hadn’t suggested it. But he shook his head.

“Nah.” He said, “What sort of mate would I be if I left you here by yourself?”

That got Remus’s back up. He tugged at the thread on his sleeve, breaking it,

“Well you’re not being much of a mate right now, to be honest. I know you’re in a mood, but--”

“I’m not in a *mood*.” Sirius spat, angrily, “I’m pissed off. Look, you don’t know what it’s like, having family out there doing merlin knows what - people *I’m actually related to*, Moony.”

“Oh god, change the bloody record, will you?” Remus groaned, getting up to prod the fire, *sorry James*, he thought, *I’m not you*. “Poor Sirius Black, the spoilt rich boy with the wicked family.”

“Oi, watch it.”

“Well I’m sorry, but we’ve had six years of this, now. No, I don’t know what it’s like, because I don’t have a family, let alone an evil one. You know what I’ve got? A pack of bloody werewolves, waiting for me to come of age so I can finally go and join all the other monsters.”

“Moony...”

“I’ve got some brutal fucking mass murdering child killer out there waiting for me. And not much else, to be honest. I don’t have the Potters, or an Uncle - I don’t even have a flipping future. So, if you don’t mind, I’d rather not sit around here listening *you* whinge about how hard you’ve got it.”

He’d only decided halfway through speaking that he was going to storm out, but he hoped it didn’t

look that way. He hadn't let himself get that angry in a very long time - and, as ever, it had been Sirius who'd brought it out. He went to the library, because there was nowhere else, and because Sirius would almost definitely look there first. It was weird, walking through the empty halls and staircases. He could hear the portraits whispering as he passed, and didn't like it.

When he got to the library, he realised that he didn't have a next step planned. He'd left all of his homework back in the dorm, so he couldn't check his notes. He could summon them, he supposed - but that somehow defeated the point of storming off.

Remus just went to the nearest shelf and pulled out a random book, sitting in the most comfortable chair he could find with it. It was on potions. Just his luck. For the first time in a few years, Remus used *Letiuncula Magna* to read. It was easier, and his head was too much of a mess to concentrate very hard. Still, it calmed him down.

"Remus."

He closed his eyes and breathed in, before looking up.

"Sorry I shouted, Padfoot."

"Sorry I was whinging." Sirius shrugged.

"Well, it's ok to be angry sometimes. It's normal." Remus smiled, setting the book down. He got up and walked over to the library entrance, where Sirius stood, hands in his pockets, like a contrite child. "I was a dickhead, though, I shouldn't have said those things."

"Ah, they were true. I'm a spoilt rich brat."

"Yeah," Remus grinned, ruffling his perfect hair, "I don't mind, though."

"We can do one of those things you wanted to do, now. If you still want...?"

"Which one? Chess?"

"Oh yeah," Sirius raised an eyebrow, "Definitely chess."

* * *

Friday 28th December 1976

"Do you want to talk about it?" Sirius asked, late in the afternoon. He had finally allowed Sirius to get on with his homework, and was playing a game of solitaire with a deck of cards he'd found. Remus had never seen Sirius occupied in such a quiet activity before, and kept sneaking glances.

"Hm?" He looked up from his Herbology, pretending he'd been completely absorbed in petal identification.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Sirius repeated, still looking at his cards, "The Greyback stuff?"

"Oh, that." Remus's throat went dry. "No, I don't. Thanks, though."

"If you're sure..." Sirius said, lifting a card and placing it on another pile. "Just because you said that you didn't think he was after you, but then yesterday you said..."

"Yeah, I know." Remus said, feeling his pulse speed up, "It just... I don't want to think about it right now. Ok?"

“Ok, then.” Sirius looked up and smiled.

Remus smiled back, and felt such a surge of love for Sirius Black that it made him dizzy.

* * *

Saturday 29th December 1976

“Foul!” Remus cheered, gleefully, as Peter’s trainers sailed over the top of the goal line.

“Balls.” Sirius sighed. “Knew that was a bit ambitious.”

“We should leave this up,” Remus said, readjusting the hanging bedsheets, “Imagine playing this with more people.”

“Evans would make us take it down.”

“Only after she’d had a go, I bet.”

“You like her, don’t you?”

Remus gave him a sharp look,

“Not this again...”

“What?!” Sirius smirked, levitating an apple from the fruit bowl the elves had left out.

“You’re obsessed with finding me a girlfriend.”

“I’m not. I just don’t want you to miss out on any of that stuff.” Sirius got the apple through the largest hole and punched the air, “Yes!”

“Five points.” Remus returned, dryly, “You’re still twenty down.” He cleared his throat, “And I’m not missing out on anything.”

“I know you don’t *think* you are, Moony, but I’m just saying--”

“Well, don’t.”

“Don’t be angry with me.”

“I’m not.” Remus fired an inkwell at the sheets so hard that he missed, and splattered the white fabric with a bright blue splodge.

“You seem pretty angry.” Sirius lowered his own wand, turning to Remus. Remus didn’t look at him.

“I don’t want a girlfriend, how many times?”

“I know you *say* that, but... I can’t help but think there must be a reason behind it... I think I know why.” Sirius shifted, awkwardly, and Remus looked at him, sideways, his heart pounding in his chest. He should have expected this, eventually. “It’s because of the werewolf thing, isn’t it?” Sirius said.

Remus opened his mouth, then closed it again. Really? *Really*?! He sat down, head in his hands, and tried not to laugh. Sirius mistook this for something else, and said, gently, “You’re worried

about a girl finding out, right? But, I mean, Evans knows, and she's fine about it, so I don't see why you wouldn't find someone else... and your scars aren't as bad as you think they are."

"Oh really?" Remus snorted.

"Yeah," Sirius nodded, encouragingly, "They're cool. And you... I mean, y'know, you're quite good looking. You're tall and you're um..."

Remus looked up at him, curiously. Sirius Black was blushing.

Jesus Christ, Remus thought, what have we got ourselves into?

* * *

Sunday 30th December 1976

"How far do you reckon Pete and Desdemona have gone?"

"Ugh, why are you thinking about that?" Remus wrinkled his nose in the dark.

"I dunno," Sirius replied, "Can't sleep."

Remus rolled onto his side, and peered across the bedroom, to where Sirius lay in his bed. He could clearly make out his pale outline, he was lying on his back, staring up at the canopy, arms behind his head.

"Not tired?" Remus asked. They'd both been in his bed, only an hour before. He felt the absence keenly, but there was nothing to be done about it.

"S'pose not. Keep thinking about tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?"

"Last day of the year."

"Yep." It would be their last day alone, too. Everyone was due back on the first of January, and the bubble they had lived in for the past eleven days would burst. "Making resolutions?" Remus asked, yawning.

"Not really. Just the usual stuff." He sounded sad. "Stuff I should stop doing."

"Well." Remus thought quickly, "Why don't you think about the stuff you *want* to do?"

"Like what?"

"Oh, I dunno," Remus stifled another yawn, "Like how you're always talking about going to London? Muggle London. Properly, I mean, not just a dodgy squat in Mile End."

"Oh yeah!" Sirius said, cheering up, "We should do that, in the summer. Can we go to Carnaby Street?"

"Don't see why not."

"I want to learn to play guitar."

"Of course you do..."

“And go camping.”

“Mmm.”

“And see Bowie in concert.”

Remus smiled, softly, listening to Sirius’s dreams as he drifted to sleep.

* * *

Monday 31st December 1976

“Do you know any sewing spells?” Remus asked, thoughtfully, sipping a mug of tea from his favourite armchair and looking up at the bedsheets which would have to come down today.

“Why would I know sewing spells?” Sirius asked, from the floor. He was sitting over a cauldron with a book beside him, trying to create his own fireworks to celebrate New Year’s Eve.

“I was just thinking about the sheets...”

“Pfft,” Sirius waved a hand, “They won’t even notice.”

“Ought to fix that crystal ball we broke, too.”

“Nah.”

“And probably should look for those chess pieces that went- er - missing...” Two days ago they had accidentally fired an entire set out of the window. They’d summoned most of the pieces back, but the queen and two knights were still in the bushes somewhere below.

“Look, everyone knew it was just going to be the two of us here for Christmas,” Sirius replied, waving his wand carefully over the cauldron, “It was *their* responsibility to lock up anything they didn’t want to get shot out of the window.”

“And Peter’s bed?”

“It’s stopped making that weird noise, now.”

“Yeah, but it still giggles when you sit on it.”

“He’ll work out how to fix it, or get Desdemona to help him. You worry too much.”

BANG

The contents of the cauldron exploded in Sirius’s face, knocking him backwards and filling the room with a plume of lime green smoke. Remus ran for the window, coughing, trying not to laugh at Sirius’s startled expression, face black with soot.

“I told you we should just ask Flitwick.”

The dust settled, and now the whole room was covered with a fine green film. Remus raised an eyebrow. Sirius smirked,

“Leave it to the house elves? I’m having a shower.”

He did go to Flitwick, in the end, and the tiny Charms professor was only too pleased to impart

some advice on creating the perfect fireworks – without any messy potions or cauldrons. “He made me promise not to tell McGonagall that he taught me, though,” Sirius laughed, “He’s really gone up in my estimation, ol’ Flitters.”

“Can’t believe you went without me. *I’m* best at Charms.” Remus muttered, as he climbed out of their bedroom window to sit on the ledge beside Sirius.

“You were sleeping!” Sirius nudged him jovially.

“Still.” Remus grumbled, folding his arms against the cold. Their legs dangled precariously over the edge, but he wasn’t as afraid of heights as he had once been. Thank James’s relentless broom training for that. He’d only taken a nap earlier to ensure he would be able to stay up until midnight - which was now only minutes away.

It was very quiet, outside, and other than the occasional animal noise rising from the Forbidden Forest, or the soft hooting of the owls in the owlery they might have been completely alone in the world. They were content to sit in this silence, as the last moments of 1976 slipped away under a frozen winter sky. Remus felt a deep sense of satisfaction and contentment. It was bittersweet. He was looking forward to seeing James, Peter and the girls again. He was looking forward to the spring term. But still, as soon as the Hogwarts Express pulled into the station the next afternoon, everything he and Sirius had shared over the past twelve nights would have to be tidied away and locked up until it was safe to resurface.

Sirius raised his pocket watch - one he had received for his seventeenth birthday from the Potters. He held it up so that Remus could read it too. Five seconds to go. Sirius smiled at him, and squeezed his knee.

“Ready?” He lifted his wand.

Remus grinned back, and nodded,

“Ready.”

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'After All' by David Bowie.

Sixth Year: Bad Moon Rising

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Gather 'round all you people

Watch me while you can

Been trawling too long, I've been losing out strong

For the strength of another man

I've been hasty, wasteful standing on the backstep

Waiting for the phone to ring

But this semi-acoustic love affair

Is driving me to the brink

I'm just looking for a friend

I'm just looking for a friend

You don't have to be a big wheel, you don't have to be the end

I'm just looking for, looking for a friend

Tuesday 1st January 1977

“Here they come!” Sirius was practically bouncing next to Remus as they watched the horseless carriages approaching the castle gates.

“Thank god.” Remus joked, “Some intelligent conversation.”

“Oh shut up, you love me really.” Sirius kicked him in the shin.

I do, Remus thought, pitifully, *I really bloody do*. But of course, that was not what Sirius had meant.

James disembarked from the mysteriously drawn carriages like a soldier returning from war. He and Sirius beamed at each other, until Remus thought that the two of *them* ought to be snogging, not Sirius and Remus. Lily and Peter climbed out of the carriage behind, and Remus hugged her and nodded to him.

“Good Christmas?” Lily asked, “Thanks for the chocolates!”

“Thanks for the gloves,” he replied waving them at her to demonstrate, “Really warm.”

“Yeah, cheers for the gloves, Evans,” James waved his own wool covered hands.

Lily blushed deeply, and mumbled something about not wanting to leave anyone out.

Earlier, Remus and Sirius had walked alone through a castle of empty halls echoing and hushed with the whispers of the portraits and the eerie drifting ghosts. But as they all returned together, it was as if the school was transformed in an instant. The flagstones rattled with the busy chatter of friends reuniting, every arch and column filled with black robed students. Remus felt he was awakening from a strange and quiet dream.

It was incredible how quickly everything settled back to normal - Peter and Desdemona started a fight almost immediately, Lily hexed James halfway through dinner, Mary had tales of her newest boyfriend, which Marlene was rolling her eyes at. Sirius had eyes only for James, of course, but Remus was keenly aware of the looks he was getting from other quarters - all of the unanswered Christmas cards would be coming home to roost.

“So, what did you two get up to?” James asked, mouth full of roast beef, “You didn’t give much away when we spoke...”

Sirius and Remus looked at each other only for the tiniest moment, long enough for Remus to note the spark of panic in Sirius and grin at James,

“Spent most of it trying to keep Padfoot out of trouble, obviously.”

James and Peter laughed, and that was all anyone needed. Sirius settled back, shoulders lowering, and Remus watched him from underneath his eyelashes. This wasn’t going to work. It was all too impossible.

The night before, just before he drifted to sleep, Remus had made a decision. He had to talk to Sirius. The irony was not lost on him, that after days and days of nothing *but* talking, the solution seemed to be *more talking*. But this time he would make Sirius listen.

He only needed an opportunity, which he accepted would not be easy. Opportunity, and just a *bit* more time. He wasn’t brave enough just yet. Just now, every song he heard reminded him of Sirius; every soppy sentence in every novel. Maybe he wasn’t quite ready to give it all up.

Sirius certainly wasn’t. Remus had tried questioning him, after everyone had been back for a few days, and Sirius had accepted an invitation to Hogsmeade from Emmeline Vance.

“Don’t you think we ought to stop? Isn’t it a bit confusing for you?”

“Why would it be confusing? It’s not the same thing.” Sirius raised his eyebrows in genuine surprise.

“Oh.” Remus said, quietly. He was glad they were in a cupboard, and it was dark, “Oh, isn’t it?”

“Well, no. She’s a girl. You’re Moony.”

“What does *that* mean?”

“It just means... you know. You and me... we’re not... and she... erm... oh, for goodness sake,” he got irritated, and gave up explaining, “I just can’t see any reason to stop, ok? It’s fun, isn’t it?”

“Yeah.” Remus sighed.

“Look, if someone asked *you* out, that would be fine, obviously.”

“Right.” Remus nodded, “That’s nice of you.”

“Oh, c’mon, don’t be like that...” Sirius started kissing his neck, and Remus was in no position to argue, after that.

He’d had plenty of opportunities, really. He was as weak as Sirius, when all was said and done.

Besides, it was just a secret – as Sirius had once said, long before everything got complicated; ‘you’re not Moony if you don’t have a secret’. He could *do* secrets. Except. It was getting harder – especially around the full moon, when his nerves were thinnest and every emotion burned just beneath the surface. Then he would see Sirius with some girl or another, watch as she picked fluff from his school jumper or straighten his tie or wrap her arms around his waist and he would want to tear her to pieces.

Sometimes he thought it must be so obvious, surely everyone could tell – surely *James* could tell? Remus would be sitting with them, or walking beside them, or eating breakfast, and his eyes would catch Sirius’s, and how could no one else *feel* it?

It made him feel guilty. Remus wondered if he was lying to Sirius even more than Sirius was lying to himself. Remus was being dishonest about what he wanted, about how much everything meant to him, and in the end he could see that he was confusing Sirius even more. The best thing was to lay everything out, then deal with the consequences.

Not yet, though. Maybe after the full moon.

* * *

Thursday 6th January 1977

Remus woke up outside. This was very wrong. The sky above was blue and cracked with clouds. There were trees, black, crooked branches. The breeze was cool on his skin, and the leaf litter soft and mulchy beneath him. Not right, but more pleasant than usual. He blinked against the morning light, and looked around, to see his three friends watching him cautiously. Sirius pulled off his cloak quickly, and handed it to Remus,

“Here, it’s chilly...”

“What happened? Why aren’t we back in the shack?” Remus frowned, pulling the cloak around himself. He noticed that James was panting hard, and holding his arm in a strange way, “Did I hurt you, Prongs?”

“Not on purpose,” James shook his head, obviously keen to keep Remus calm, “You were... you kept trying to get away from us, that’s all. We couldn’t get you to follow us like normal, not even Padfoot.”

“I remember...” Remus frowned, and climbed to his feet, “Were we hunting?”

“*You* were.” Sirius said, looking at him oddly, “There was something you really wanted to get at. In Hogsmeade.”

“In Hogsmeade..?” It all came flooding back like a bad dream. That scent. He’d smelled it first on Christmas Eve in the Hog’s Head, and even then he had known what it was. How could he be so stupid? “You’re sure you’re not hurt?” Remus asked, again, looking at James.

James nodded fervently, his messy hair bobbing in the morning breeze.

“Come on,” he jerked his head, “We’ve got to get you back to the shack before Madam Pomfrey gets there...”

He followed them, treading gingerly over the stony forest floor in bare feet.

“We’re not too far,” Sirius said, walking slowly beside him, “We managed to sort of... shepherd you in the right direction... but you kept trying to give us the slip.”

“You all have to go back to the castle,” Remus said, unable to meet their eyes, “I think... I think something might have happened last night.”

“Nothing happened, Moony,” Peter said, “We didn’t lose sight of you once, honestly.”

“That’s good,” Remus nodded. The shack was in sight now, “But you still ought to go. Trust me.”

Thankfully, they did; all still shaken by whatever had taken place just before Remus returned to his human body. Remus entered the shack, dressed and sat quietly on the bed to wait for Madam Pomfrey. She did not come. Instead, it was McGonagall who opened the trap door, almost an hour after daybreak.

“Mr Lupin,” she said, in the usual brisk manner she used when a detention was forthcoming.

“Where’s Madam Pomfrey?” He asked, feeling very cold all of a sudden.

“She’s on other business this morning, in Hogsmeade,” The professor said, her face lined with concern, “She asked me to attend you. Are you injured?”

“No, I’m fine. What happened in Hogsmeade?”

“Come along, Lupin,” his teacher said, turning quickly back into the tunnel, “If you’re quite well, then we should be getting back to the castle as quickly as possible.”

“Please,” he had to walk quickly to keep up with her, which wasn’t easy when your bones were still settling back into their usual positions, “Please, professor, what happened in Hogsmeade?”

“I’m afraid I can’t--”

“It was a werewolf, wasn’t it? An attack?”

“Remus.” She turned and looked at him. They were eye level, these days, and he was still growing. “How do you know?” She asked, sharply.

“I could smell it - the other one. I knew they were nearby. It wasn’t me! I swear.”

“No, we would know if you had escaped.” She seemed very sure about that, so he didn’t object.

“Was it bad?”

“...Yes.”

“Someone’s dead?”

“I’m afraid so. Now I really can’t talk about it, so let’s just get you back to the castle, all right? I know that Poppy usually keeps you in the infirmary for a day or so to rest, but do you think you

could go to your lessons as usual today? I think it might be best to avoid any suspicion.”

“Of course.”

“You can come to me if you feel unwell at any point.”

“I’ll be fine.” His voice was low and empty. He had never met another one. Now he knew there was one close by.

“Remus,” McGonagall said, giving him a severe look, “This was not your fault. This was nobody's fault. Do you understand?”

“Yes, professor.” It was better just to tell adults what they wanted to hear, most of the time. Perhaps he could write to Ferox, or even Moody. Remus desperately wanted to talk to Sirius about it privately, but he supposed he might have to wait a little while.

He knew it all, now. There had been another wolf in Hogsmeade over Christmas, and it had been waiting for the full moon. They had to be on Voldemort’s side – on Greyback’s side – because, in Remus’s opinion at least, you’d have to be mad or evil or both to place yourself near other people during a full moon. Ought he to have told somebody that he’d recognised the smell on Christmas eve? Could he have saved a life? He hadn’t been *sure*, and he hadn’t wanted to get in trouble for sneaking out.

The breakfast hall was buzzing with the news; owls were flying back and forth. Lily sat deliberately next to Remus and squeezed his hand under the table. He squeezed back, gratefully, and thought how easy it would be to fall in love with her if he was that type of man.

“It’s horrible,” Marlene said, tearfully, reading the paper over Mary’s shoulder. “That poor woman, murdered in her bed...”

It had been a young couple, who had moved to Hogsmeade in November. Both magical, but she was muggle born. She was dead, her husband bitten and apparently at St. Mungo’s. Their wedding photo graced the front page of the *Prophet*, and made Remus sick to look at.

“Is it still on the loose?” Remus asked, keeping the hand which was not holding Lily’s flat on the table, so nobody could see him trembling.

“Looks like,” Mary confirmed, still engrossed in the article, “No one could catch it. Tonight’s not a full moon, so we’re all safe for at least another month, I suppose... that’s the trouble with werewolves, if you don’t catch them on the moon, then how are you supposed to catch them at all?”

“There must be a test, or something,” Marlene frowned, “A revealing charm.”

“Yeah,” Mary replied, thoughtfully, “Maybe... but then you might end up finding the wrong one...”

“Well, it sounds like they’re all on *you-know-who*’s side anyway, so I don’t think it matters—”

“Let’s talk about something else.” Lily said, loudly.

“Yeah,” James nodded, “Defence Against the Darks Arts next – anyone had any luck with their patronus, yet?”

Only James had, so far. Half an hour later, the class stood slack-jawed and watched James produce

a spectacular silver stag, which galloped ghostly around the room. The teacher applauded, and invited everyone else to try – with varying levels of success. Lily managed a wisp of something, but it wasn't clear yet what it was. Peter had no luck at all, and (to the surprise of nobody) Sirius cast something distinctly dog-shaped, but without the solid brightness of James's creation.

Remus didn't so much as feel his wand flinch. He oughtn't to have been surprised – on a morning like that it was impossible to pin down a happy thought for very long, besides which, he was exhausted from the full moon.

"You'll get it, Moony," Sirius encouraged, patting him awkwardly on the back as they left the classroom. "You always do."

Remus nodded, wondering what Sirius's happy thought was. Remus had been using various memories of their Christmas together, though with poor results.

"My mind's elsewhere, to be honest," he said, quietly, so that only Sirius could hear him.

"Of course," Sirius replied, just as quietly, "That's to be expected."

"I knew about it." Remus whispered, quickly, as the last few students left the room. Sirius stopped, staring at him with that awful look he'd had that morning. Remus grabbed his arm, "I mean, not exactly, I didn't know that would happen, but..."

Sirius closed the door behind the last student, and whispered a silencing spell.

"But what?"

"Remember when we went to the Hog's Head?" Remus said, quickly, and still whispering because he couldn't seem to raise his voice. Sirius nodded, "I smelled something."

"I thought you were just pissed..."

"Yeah," Remus nodded, "I think maybe I did too – or I thought it was... um... well, you, because I wanted..." he cleared his throat, "Anyway, it was definitely another one. A werewolf. I think it was female."

"Not Greyback, then." Sirius said, with a look of immense relief.

"No." Remus said.

"Well, thank Godric for that." Sirius grasped Remus's shoulder. His face turned to worry again, just as quickly, "But Moony, if *you* could smell *them*, do you think that they could..."

"I don't know. I think so."

"Ok. Ok, well they didn't come after you, so... Everything will be fine." He was still holding Remus by the shoulder, keeping him in place, like an anchor. It was desperately needed, Remus thought. Every instinct in him said to run.

Remus thought for a moment Sirius might kiss him, but they had another lesson to go to, and the DADA teacher had returned, knocking on his own classroom door in confusion. Sirius looked disappointed (or at least, Remus thought so – it might have been wishful thinking) and gave a final squeeze before they parted.

"Don't tell James!" Remus said, hurriedly, as they unlocked the door, "Please, don't tell anyone."

“Ok, Moony,” Sirius nodded slowly, “Anything you want.”

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'Looking for a Friend' by David Bowie.

Sixth Year: Spilling Secrets

Chapter Summary

No major CWs for this chapter - but discussion of homophobia towards the end.

Friday 14th January 1977

Remus tossed and turned under his bedsheets, unable to settle. His bed at Hogwarts rated as one of the most comfortable he had ever slept in – a close second to the one he used at the Potter's, anyway. Rarely had he ever struggled to sleep in it. But the past few nights had been almost entirely sleepless.

He couldn't stop thinking about the werewolf in Hogsmeade, about the poor dead woman, and the man who would wake up in St Mungo's to find that his entire life had been destroyed. Remus had been afflicted for as long as he could remember – the thought of this man being forced to transform for the first time – probably alone, probably still grieving. It was unbearable. He felt a horrible, unmoveable sense of guilt.

So Remus did not sleep. He had been resorting to reading most of the night, until he couldn't keep his eyes open any longer. Tonight, he couldn't even concentrate on a book.

He rolled onto his front, to see if that would help. No, his face was all squashed in his pillow that way. He rolled on his side, but this made his hip hurt. The other side made his ear too hot. He groaned under his breath.

"Oi, Moony," Sirius whispered, as the curtains parted, "What's wrong?" He crawled inside silently, with a quick *lumos* and a silencing spell. He knelt at the end of the bed, looking at Remus.

"Sorry, did I wake you up?" Remus squinted at the unnecessary brightness.

"Yeah, but it's ok." Sirius shifted and plonked himself down next to Remus.

"Oh," Remus twisted his mouth, embarrassed, "Look, I'm not really in the mood for..."

"Oh, no, me neither! I mean... well, actually, now you mention it... but no, not why I came over."

"Right."

"So, what's up?"

"Can't sleep."

"I can tell. Want a fag?"

"Run out."

"It's ok, I've got some off Emmeline. C'mon, shall we go downstairs? It's late, no one'll be there and Prongs'll give us shit if we smoke here."

"Ok." Remus pretended to go reluctantly. Secretly he was thrilled that:

1. Sirius was worried about him, and;
2. Sirius wanted to spend time alone with him without waking up James.

The fact that the offered cigarettes came from Sirius's current girlfriend was a fact Remus was willing to overlook for now. Downstairs, they settled by the window, on the little loveseat there. Both drew their knees up and sat facing each other, so that if Remus stretched just a little their toes would touch.

"So," Sirius sucked in, lighting a cigarette wordlessly then passing it to Remus, before lighting his own. It was probably something that impressed girls. It impressed Remus too, but he wasn't going to show it. "What's the plan?"

"Plan?" Remus frowned.

"You've been up all night for the past three nights and you haven't got a plan?! Are you sure you're Moony??"

"I want to go back to The Hog's Head." Remus said, promptly.

Sirius let his eyes flicker, but took this news in slowly. He exhaled smoke, looking out of the dark window at the waning moon above them before returning to Remus to speak.

"Right. Ok, I think I can understand why." He took a hard drag on his cigarette, "Invisible?"

"No." Remus shook his head, taking short, nervous pulls on his fag, "No, if they're there – if *she's* there, then I want to meet her."

"Remus. No."

"Why not?" Remus shot back, hotly. He was ready for a fight, if Sirius wanted one. That would feel good; that would be *something*.

"Because it's dangerous?! Because you've never met them before and you don't know what they're like except that they *murdered* a woman the other night?! Because you're not even seventeen yet and if you have to defend yourself with magic you could get kicked out of school??"

Sirius was staring at him as he said all of this, incredulous. Remus blinked in shock. He stubbed out his cigarette and stood up, using his height against Sirius,

"You can't tell me what to do. Just don't get in my way."

"Don't be like that! Look, I understand how you feel--"

"Ha."

"Ok, I don't *understand*," Sirius shook his head impatiently, "but I want you to be safe!"

"I will be - it's ages until the next full moon, she won't have any advantage over me--"

"Don't you think this is exactly what Greyback *wants*?!"

"What are you saying?" Remus growled. "That I'm being stupid?"

"No, not stupid, just... reckless."

"Sirius Black, lecturing me on recklessness? Very bloody funny, that."

“Oi.” Sirius stood up now, angry.

Yes, here we go, something in Remus said, go on, try it.

“Well it’s pretty rich of *you* to tell *me* not to put myself in danger.” Remus continued, knowing he was being cruel, “You weren’t so concerned about my safety this time last year!”

Sirius’s face fell, he looked down at the carpet and Remus saw what he had done.

“That’s... that’s not fair, Moony.” Sirius said, quietly.

Life’s not fair, Remus wanted to say - but he knew how childish and petulant that would sound. This wasn’t an argument either of them was going to win, and he was tired, so exhausted from worrying and thinking and imagining and *not sleeping*.

“I have to meet them.” He said, finally. “I think I’ll go mad otherwise. I think I’m already going mad.”

“Ok.” Sirius recovered, and ran his hand through his hair. “Ok, what about Ferox, have you tried talking to him?”

“Thought about it. He’ll try to stop me. Moody too. It’s their idea not to let me go to Hogsmeade in the first place.”

“All right... all right, we’ll go, ok? Together. We’ll tell James, and--”

“I don’t want anyone else to know.” Remus said, fiercely, “It’s private.”

“Merlin, Moony, you’re not making this easy--”

“It’s *not* easy! It’s fucking difficult, ok, but I have to do it!”

“Ok!” Sirius raised both hands in a peace-making gesture.

We’re fighting, Remus thought, *we’re fighting and he’s the one trying to calm me down*. That made him feel a bit dizzy, and he sat down on the nearest sofa. He leaned forward, head in his hands.

“I’m sorry,” he said, in a small voice, “I know I’m being... it’s just all so...”

“I do understand, Moony.” Sirius sat next to him. “I’m trying to help.”

“You can’t help,” Remus said, “I have to do this on my own, I can’t risk anyone else, it has to be me, I have to...” Remus began talking, and it all came out in a jumble of sleep-deprived babble. “If I can meet her, then maybe... I have to meet Greyback, one day. I just know I have to. And I want to - not to join him, or anything like that, just to - to know him. And to understand. Why he did what he did and why... why he made me who I am.”

Tears had sprung out of nowhere, and he covered his face, ashamed. Sirius was quiet beside him.

“Moony...” he laid a cool, tentative hand on Remus’s shoulder, lightly, as if Remus might spin around and snap at him like a wild animal, “He didn’t make you who you are.”

“He made me *what* I am.” Oh god, he was sobbing, now. He wished he hadn’t started this whole conversation, wished he’d just sent Sirius back to bed.

The last time he'd cried had been a similar situation - he had been sitting next to a boy he loved, saying something which hurt to say. Grant had held him, and made him feel like everything would be all right. Remus knew he had no right to expect the same from Sirius.

As Remus's shoulders began to shake with emotion, Sirius moved slightly, but he didn't go anywhere. Remus heard him give a strange little noise – which might have been sympathetic, or just confused, but he shifted closer and slid his hand down into Remus's and squeezed his fingers. Pathetically, Remus squeezed back as he wept angrily about Greyback, and the poor murdered woman, and the dreadful unfairness of everything.

* * *

Saturday 15th January 1977

Remus woke up at dawn, still curled up on the couch, covered in a woollen blanket from the dresser kept in the corner of the common room. He frowned against the sunlight, blinking and confused while he slowly remembered where he was. Sirius was still there, at the other end, sitting up with his head lolling back in sleep, mouth open. *Of course* Sirius didn't snore.

Remus wished he could watch him for a bit longer in the dim early light, but he had been scrunched up all night and desperately needed to stretch. He moved carefully, his stiff limbs creaking like the branches of an ancient yew. Sirius stirred, coughed lightly and opened his eyes.

"Morning," he grunted, straightening up. "What time is it?"

"Nearly seven." Remus replied, after a quick glance at the grandfather clock.

"James'll be up for quidditch in a minute."

"Yeah."

"You ok?"

Remus set his bare feet down on the carpet and rubbed the pins and needles out of his left leg.

"I slept, at least." He replied. "Sorry for last night."

"Pff." Sirius waved his hand, yawning, "It was nothing. I've had much worse meltdowns."

"What are you two tossers doing down here at this hour?" James came bounding down the stairs, broom in hand. He looked at them both, took in their pyjamas and Remus's blanket. "Did you *sleep* here?"

"Had to," Sirius replied, stretching, "Anything to get away from your snoring."

James grinned, shaking his head.

"Weirdos. Don't fancy joining me for a quick go around the pitch before practice, Padfoot?"

"Nah," Sirius yawned again, "I'm going back to bed. It's Saturday, Potter, you lunatic."

"It's Hogsmeade, later, don't oversleep." James warned, "Sorry, Moony." He gave an apologetic glance.

"S'ok," Remus replied, "You lot go and have fun. I've got homework. Obviously. The common room will be nice and quiet."

“See you both for breakfast, then?” James asked, halfway out of the room already, eager to be the first on the pitch.

The common room would start filling up, soon - the Gryffindor quidditch team first, then some of the keener students looking to get their homework out of the way before the trip into the village scheduled for later. Remus looked at Sirius,

“Are you really going back to bed?”

Sirius raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah. Want to come?”

For the first time in days, Remus laughed.

* * *

“Hi Remus, can I sit here?”

Remus looked up with a small frown that had more to do with a complex Astronomy chart than being interrupted. He smiled as soon as he saw who it was, and nodded,

“Of course, Chris, take your pick.” He motioned to the five empty chairs at the table he was using. Christopher sat just one seat away from Remus. “Didn’t fancy Hogsmeade?”

“Oh, well, I knew *you* couldn’t go, and I’m behind on a few things, so...” Christopher looked slightly nervous. He sat with his notebooks and parchment clutched in his lap, eyeing Remus shiftily.

“Er... did you want to get your work out?” Remus prompted, vaguely amused.

“Yeah! Sorry...” Christopher quickly started spreading out his notes, awkwardly, blushing fiercely.

“You ok, Chris?”

“Mm hmm, yep...”

“Ok. Well, I’m doing Astronomy and making a proper mess of it. You’re quite good at stars and stuff, aren’t you?”

“Yeah. I mean not brilliant. But ok, yeah, er... want me to look?”

“Thanks,” Remus slid over his chart.

“Oh right, I can see where you’ve gone wrong, you’re a few degrees out...” Christopher pulled out his compass and began plotting a new trajectory for Venus. Remus was quite happy to let him get on with it, and started flicking through his planner. He had History to do, but had perversely planned to save it for last as a treat. He could probably tell Christopher that to lighten the mood; it was the sort of thing Chris did too. Sirius would only shake his head in bafflement and call him a swot.

He was just about to say something, when Christopher beat him to it.

“I started reading some muggle books.” He said, in a rush, as if he had been building up to it for a while. “Over Christmas.”

“Did you?” Remus smiled, politely. He’d been telling Christopher for ages that he was limiting himself by not reading books by non-magical authors. “How’d you get on?”

“Yeah! It’s been great. I like poetry best...” It was a fairly innocuous statement, but Christopher looked as though he was spilling his very darkest secret. His cheeks were crimson now, and he wasn’t looking at Remus when he spoke. “I er... I like Oscar Wilde, a lot.”

“Oh?” Remus replied, steadily, wondering where this was going.

He thought he had a pretty good idea what Christopher was getting at, actually, but he needed to stall for time while he worked out how to react. Surely they weren’t going to talk about this *here* and *now*, at three o’clock on a Saturday in an only half empty common room? There were first years playing gobstones on the carpet, for goodness sake!

“Yes, and... and Christopher Isherwood.” Chris continued, valiantly. It *was* brave, Remus decided. It was maybe the bravest thing he had ever witnessed.

“Right, yeah...” He cleared his throat, wishing he knew the right way to respond. “You might like Truman Capote, too.”

Christopher looked at him, half eager, half afraid.

“They’re er... they’re *your sort* of writers too, then?” Christopher was gnawing his lip very hard now, Remus was worried he would bit through the skin.

“Um... yeah.”

He didn’t know how he felt about it really. He’d had an inkling – more than an inkling – about Christopher for quite some time. But he hadn’t expected this in a million years. Christopher looked incredibly relieved, and leaned in,

“How long have you known?” He whispered.

Remus leaned back, panicking over who might be listening. He glanced around quickly, then rubbed the back of his head.

“Christ.” He breathed, “I *really* need a cigarette. Want to go for a walk?”

This was perhaps the worst possible time to talk about this. But that wasn’t Christopher’s fault. Christopher didn’t know about the werewolf situation, or Greyback, or Sirius’s nonsensical attitude to sexuality, or even that the marauders were planning to go to war in just a year’s time. Christopher only knew one thing, and Remus knew that he needed a friend.

They went to the Astronomy Tower, knowing it was likely to be empty – all of the couples were in Hogsmeade today. They sat outside, backs against the parapet, and Remus smoked and Christopher twisted his hands in his lap.

“How long have you known?” He asked again.

“Since I was fifteen.” Remus replied. “Summer before last. You?”

“Um... I think I sort of always had an idea. But. Yeah, maybe only for a few months.”

“It’s going to be ok, you know.” Remus said, hoping he sounded believable. It wasn’t *exactly* a lie - but he didn’t know for sure.

“Do the other marauders know? About you?”

Remus flinched, remembering the heat of Sirius’s skin against him from earlier that morning. How he had held his hand as he cried. How he had left breakfast early to meet Emmeline. He shook his head,

“Nah. Not yet.”

“None of my friends know. You’re the only person I’ve told.”

Remus didn’t know what to say about that. Not everybody had a Grant, he supposed. He half laughed, half sighed.

“Sorry, Chris. Wish I had some advice or something, but I’m just muddling through.”

“That’s ok. It’s just good to know there’s someone else... is it like this with muggles?”

“Hm? Oh, well... I mean there *are* queer muggles, yeah. Obviously, Oscar Wilde and that. They used to be able to send you to prison, but it’s ok now. Well. Not ok. It’s not... I mean, it’s still better *not* to be queer, I suppose. What about with wizards?”

“Same,” Christopher replied, glumly, “Better not to be.”

They were quiet for a bit. Remus started another cigarette. It was becoming a dreadful habit; he struggled to climb the stairs any more without wheezing.

“Remus?” Christopher said.

“Yeah?”

“I’m glad... er, I’m glad that if there was anyone else who... knew... then I’m glad it’s you.”

God. Remus thought, *why’d you have to be so bloody sweet?*

* * *

All in all, it had been a very busy Saturday. And it wasn’t over yet, Remus told himself as he lay in the dark, still as possible, waiting for his friends’ breathing to level out, to tell him they were all asleep. He was keeping still and quiet to try and trick Sirius - he couldn’t afford an interruption tonight. He had places to be.

Yes, ok; he had told Sirius he wouldn’t go to The Hog’s Head. Or at least that he wouldn’t go without him. But, Remus justified to himself, this was too important, and he had to go alone. He couldn’t be responsible for putting any more people in danger than he already had. And, actually, he thought, grumpily, as he began to creep out of the room, James’s cloak stuffed under his robes, who was *Sirius* to demand anything from Remus? Tossing each other off every now and then clearly didn’t mean they had any special claim on each other. Sirius couldn’t have everything his way.

He covered himself with the invisibility cloak in the darkness of the stairway, and then stole quietly through the half empty common room and out of the portrait hole. He had the map and he had his wand, and nothing else.

Sooner than he had expected, Remus found himself already outside the statue of the humpbacked witch, and then he was in the tunnel, walking at a speed he rarely managed. He didn’t need to light

his wand, as he usually did when the others were with him. He just ploughed on through the cold air, the smell of chocolate was getting stronger by the minute and it had never been less appetising.

In Honeyduke's, he was able to get through to the front of the shop with little trouble, though he had a hairpin he'd pinched off Mary just in case. And all of a sudden, he was there; standing alone in Hogsmeade. He kept going, it was the only option. He could smell her already, she was still there, or had been recently. Remus's heart began to pound. He was more frightened than he ever had been in his life – more frightened than he had been last year, waking up to find out what Sirius had done.

Outside The Hog's Head he finally stopped for breath. The scent was very strong now. Light glowed through the dirty pub windows, and Remus could see that it was not busy inside, though there were customers. He pulled back the cloak, breathing in the chill January air.

There was movement behind him; a noise like a gasp of delight.

“There you are! Who's a pretty boy, then?”

Sixth Year: The Long Night

Chapter Summary

Slightly dark chapter, this one. Both in terms of themes and angsty emotional stuff.

She was not what he had expected. Well, he had not known what to expect - but it was certainly not this. She was small bodied, but had the bearing of someone much taller. Her sharp angular features were made more severe by her shaved head and huge fog grey eyes which focussed on him with a predator's glint. She had a wide mouth, and her lip had been split at some point, and healed badly. She had scars too; as many as he did, but almost invisible under a complex lacework of small circular tattoos, spiralling across her weatherbeaten skin in untraceable sequences.

"Remus Lupin," she said, in a low, gravelly voice. She had a horrible, menacing smile. She showed all of her teeth - which were in bad condition, discoloured and uneven. "I've been waiting for you, my dear."

He pulled out his wand at once, adopting a duelling stance.

"Drop that!" She snarled, raising a hand - her nails were long, yellow and clawed, filthy with dirt.

His wand clattered to the ground, and he gasped. Remus was frozen to the spot. She stood only meters away, and his wand was within reach, but he couldn't move a muscle. She laughed, her breath stark and white in the winter air, "I saw you here on Christmas Eve," she said. She pointed to the dark alley, "I saw you there, with the human. I followed you both."

"What do you want?" He asked, steadily, staring her down. She was repulsive, unclean - her cloak was heavy matted animal fur, crawling with lice and other vermin. She stank of the forest, and rot, and blood. Despite this, something drew him in - something familiar, safe and welcoming. *Pack*, the wolf told him, a low growl from somewhere inside. *Pack*.

"We want *you*, brother." She said, stepping forward.

She lowered her hand, and he felt a sort of un-clicking in his muscles, and stepped back, automatically.

"We?" He asked, finding courage now that he could move again. He snatched up his wand and she allowed it.

"We. Us." She said, stepping forward again. She walked with one foot in front of the other, like an animal. Her feet were bare on the cobbles, black with filth.

"Who's 'us'?" He asked, glancing back, quickly. He was almost at the door. If he backed away far enough, he'd be visible from inside the pub windows.

"Your family, Remus Lupin."

"Oh, right?" He asked, still distracted by his progress towards the pub. He had to get closer to *people*. "Well," he tried smiling, "If we're family, I'd better buy you a drink..."

“You reek of human terror, Remus Lupin.” She said, tilting her head to one side.

“Sorry,” he said, with a shrug. “Do you want a drink, or not?”

“If it pleases you.”

“Great...” he pushed open the door with some relief, and stepped into the grimy pub. He had never really felt ‘safe’ in The Hog’s Head, but he had never been quite so glad to be surrounded by other wizards; dark or not. There were maybe five or six of them, including the old white-bearded barman. A few patrons glanced up from under their hoods as the two werewolves entered - but if they had any clue about the situation, they made no sign of it.

She sat at a table, not taking her eyes off Remus for a moment. He didn’t order drinks, just sat opposite her. He placed both hands on the table, feeling that this was the safest option; hoping that she would see he was not planning to attack.

“So. You know my name. What’s yours?” He didn’t know where this cavalier attitude had come from - whether it was a momentary madness or just the outcome of his own stupidity, but it was keeping him safe for now.

“Livia.”

“Livia...?”

“We do not need other names. We belong to the pack.”

“Right, ok. So... you were sent by the pack?”

“I was sent by my father.”

“Greyback.”

She did not reply, she just kept staring at him with her strange, violent eyes. She did not belong indoors, he felt. The train of her cloak was caked in mud, and dirt smeared the parts of her skin that were visible. Up close, he could see that her tattoos were not simply circles - they were moon phases. “Is Greyback really your father?” Remus asked, keeping his voice low.

“He is our father.” She said.

“Order or leave.” The tall, ancient bar man appeared by their side. Remus looked up at him, wishing he knew how to transmit thoughts.

“Er... butterbeer, please.”

Livia did not say anything, and the barman did not question her, only snapped his fingers, and the bottle appeared. He shuffled away, back behind his bar. Remus wiped the rim of the bottle cautiously, and took a sip. It was much too sickly, and not cold enough. “Ok,” he said to Livia again, “You’re in Greyback’s pack. That er... must be nice? Do you--”

“I called for you, Remus Lupin.” Livia interrupted, settling back in her chair. Remus was convinced that he had not yet seen her blink. “I heard you calling for me, you sang so beautifully.”

“You mean on the moon...”

“I waited as long as I could, but the hunt was too good and I was hungry...” her eyes gleamed brightly, as if the memory was still very fresh, “Why didn’t you come to me? They did not lock

you up; I followed your scent for days afterwards.”

“I’m not a killer.” He said. “I don’t hunt.”

She laughed,

“Madness. What have they done to you, my poor brother? Father told me you had suffered at the human’s hands, but I did not know how much.”

“I don’t suffer.” Remus replied, indignantly. “I’ve been lucky. They take care of me.”

“Poor boy,” she said sadly, “You do not know. But of course, that is not your fault. *‘How could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?’*”

“Plato?” Remus sat up, curious, “Greyback lets you study muggle philosophy?”

“My father places no limitations on me. My father wishes me to be free and strong and wise.”

“And a murderer.”

“Wolves cannot murder. You know this, Remus Lupin.”

“But we aren’t wolves, are we?” He whispered. “Not all the time.”

“We are what we are.” She replied. She was enjoying this, he could tell. “You can wear that uniform and wave your silly stick, but you know that you have more in common with me than anyone in that castle.” She licked her lips, “I have come to bring you home, Remus Lupin.”

“Why now?”

“The time is right,” She cocked her head, “Father prefers to wait until we are of age - so that we come to him with a true understanding of our place in the world; the place the human filth have forced on us. But time is short for us all, these days.”

“I’m not going with you.” He said. “I belong here. I’m a wizard.”

She laughed again, a throaty, deep laugh that rattled in her chest and spoke of long cold winters in hard, unforgiving environments.

“A wizard,” she spat, ruefully. “To think that a magnificent beast like you would aspire to be such a creature! You don’t know half of the power you hold, Remus Lupin. Nor does Dumbledore.”

“I’m still not going anywhere.”

“Father suspected you would be difficult. He is very eager to meet you.”

That sent a chill down Remus’s spine. She smiled again, reading him like a book. Remus swallowed, dryly, ignoring the butterbeer now,

“I’d like to meet him.” He replied, stiffly.

“In time,” she nodded, “Once you have come to understand your place.”

“What’s he like?” Remus barely breathed the question. Livia’s eyes shone, and he had the impression that she could not see him; she was imagining something wonderful.

“He is magnificent.”

“You think that...?!” Remus could hardly keep the emotion from his voice, “You call him your father, after what he did to you?”

“He elevated me.” She hissed, her eyes focussing again, eyebrows knitting into a frown, “He gave me the greatest gift. And he gave it to you, Remus Lupin. Your father is calling you home.”

“And that’s what you’re here for, is it?” He looked her up and down. She gave a small shrug,

“My father had hoped that I might be the right one to persuade you. I learnt on Christmas Eve that he was mistaken – we did not know that your desires lay elsewhere.” She licked her lips again, her eyes raking over him, “This will not be a problem, I should let you know. The pack does not discriminate. You will find someone to your taste.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” He repeated. “You can tell him that. And I want *you* gone before the next moon.”

“Don’t flatter yourself, my dear brother,” she arched an eyebrow, “I am here at my father’s request. I came to speak with you, and nothing more.”

“You murdered a woman!”

“Wolves cannot murder, Remus Lupin. I waited for you. When you did not come, I followed my nature. It is not easy, I know. Learning that the world is not as it seems is very painful. But you will learn. And you will come to us.”

She tapped out a rhythm on the beer soaked table with her disgusting fingernails, and once again Remus found himself frozen in place. She smiled, and ran a blackened talon across his arm, slowly. It was hideous, vile, revolting, raising goosebumps in his flesh, but he couldn’t get away.

“They will trap you, like this,” she whispered, “They will cage you, shackle you and tie you down until you are half mad with hunger. You will be beaten and betrayed. You will be alone and you will live in fear. This is a promise, Remus Lupin.”

His heart was hammering against his ribcage, he was giddy with terror, but still he could not move, or speak, or react. She dug her nails into his arm, and he could not cry out, but tears of pain welled in his eyes as beads of dark blood bubbled up through his broken skin. “And you will come to us, crawling, defeated, and your father will welcome you with open arms and the love of the pack. You will never be lonely again.”

CRACK

Someone apparated into the pub, catching Livia’s attention. Remus couldn’t turn his head to see, but she did, still gripping Remus’s arm with all her strength, her face turned sour and angry.

“*Argentum creol!*” A gruff voice shouted, and Livia shrieked, letting go of Remus and covering her face as silver chains burst forth from the incantation, coiling themselves around her neck and arms. Groaning in pain, she hissed at Remus,

“I will see you soon, brother!” Before apparating herself, with a blistering *CRACK*.

The silver chains fell to the saw dust covered floor like a glistening snake, and Remus slumped forward, finally free. He turned away from his rescuer and threw up, his arm throbbing and the silver making his head swim.

“Finite.” The same gruff voice said, making the chains (and the vomit) disappear in an instant, “Sorry about that, Remus.”

Leo Ferox sat down in the seat opposite, where Livia had been only seconds before. Remus blinked at him through watering eyes, and shook his head, wiping his mouth quickly,

“S’ok...” he croaked, feeling weak and shaken to the core. “Thanks.”

“Are you all right?” Ferox asked, his blue eyes filled with parental concern.

“I think so, it’s just the silver...” Remus nodded, clutching his arm, and taking a quick swig of butterbeer to clear the bitter taste in his mouth. “Yeah.” He nodded again.

“Good.” Ferox’s face turned stern. He reached across the table and slapped Remus around the back of the head. Remus yelped and ducked, more out of shock than pain. He stared at Ferox, wounded. His old teacher glared back at him, “Then you can tell me what the bloody hell you think you’re doing!”

“I was... she was...”

“I know exactly what she was. We’ve been tracking her for weeks.”

“We?”

“Me and Moody,” Ferox said, impatiently, as if this was not the point, “Didn’t I tell you how dangerous Greyback was? Was I not clear!?”

“You were clear.” Remus scowled. “But I can make my own choices.”

“Obviously.” Ferox growled.

The tall, white bearded barman appeared at Ferox’s shoulder, with a tumbler of firewhisky. Ferox accepted it, and downed it in one. “Thanks, Aberforth,” he nodded to the barman, who nodded and shuffled away again. Ferox shook his head, still angry, “You’re lucky he saw you. You’re lucky he knew enough to contact Moody before he contacted anyone else!”

“Why, who is he?” Remus turned to look.

“It doesn't matter.” Ferox snapped, drawing Remus’s attention back. “But you’re damned lucky.”

“Ok, ok!” Remus looked at his hands. His arm had stopped bleeding, but it was stinging very unpleasantly. Who knew what kind of muck she’d had under her nails. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not good enough, Remus!” Ferox sighed, deeply. “You were stupid, and careless, and you could have been killed! Do you know what they want? Do you know why she was waiting for you?!”

“Yes.” He replied, churlishly, folding his arms, careful not to bump the one that hurt, “She told me.”

Ferox huffed, furiously,

“They want to make you one of them!”

“I’m already one of them!” Remus shouted, standing up so fast his stool flew backwards, clattering on the dirty pub floor and attracting everyone’s attention. Remus didn’t care. He started for the

door. Ferox followed him outside. Remus walked faster, heading for Honeyduke's, "You're not my dad. You're not even my teacher anymore, so piss off and leave me alone!"

His terror had turned to rage so quickly, his head still throbbing from the silver, and from being slapped (*just like bloody Matron, bloody adults are all the bloody same*), his arm hurting and itching more than ever. And Remus was not quick on his feet at the best of times. Ferox caught up easily. He grabbed his shoulder,

"Oi! Look, maybe I was a bit harsh, but... *Jesus christ*, Lupin! You gave us all such a fright."

Remus stopped at that,

"All?"

Ferox sighed again.

"Come on. I'd better take you back to the castle. There are some people waiting for you."

Before they began to walk back, Ferox cast a patronus, a huge, long legged bird, to send a message up to Hogwarts that they were both safe.

"Dumbledore knows, then." Remus sighed.

"Fraid so."

"And McGonagall, I s'pose."

"You're looking at a lot of detention, Remus, I won't lie to you."

Remus snorted, and looked up at Ferox properly for the first time. Actually - he didn't have to look up. In the two years since they had last met, Remus had caught up in height. They were eye to eye. Ferox was still golden haired, ruggedly handsome and weather beaten, but he was no longer the hero Remus had worshipped at thirteen. He was just a man – a soldier in a war, like all of them.

"I'm really sorry." Remus said, "I knew it was stupid, I can't even explain myself."

"Ah, you don't have to, lad," Ferox clapped a hand to his shoulder, "It's only natural, knowing what you know about him."

"I've never met another... werewolf... before." He said. "Are they all like that?"

Ferox glanced at him sideways,

"What do you think?"

Remus thought about this while they walked, and eventually shook his head.

"No, I suppose they can't be." He sighed, "There are good and bad people. Good and bad wizards. Why should monsters be any different?"

"Remus me old pal, if you could get everyone else to understand that then I don't think there would be a war on."

* * *

He was brought straight to Dumbledore's office. Remus had never been inside it before, and it was

almost as anxiety inducing as meeting Livia. It was a high ceilinged airy room with portraits covering the walls and cabinets full of strange curiosities. Terrifyingly, Dumbledore was alone, sitting at his desk, writing on a long piece of parchment. Remus stood in silence for at least five minutes.

“Mr Lupin.” The headmaster said, finally. “We seem always to meet under the most unpleasant conditions.”

“Yeah. Fair enough.” Remus nodded. He’d had too much of a night to care much about what Dumbledore had to say. *I said I’d fight for your bloody cause, old man, what more do you want?*

Dumbledore watched his nonchalance carefully.

“You have done a very dangerous thing, tonight.”

“Yeah,” he raised his bandaged arm.

“You know that is not what I am referring to.”

“I know.” Remus replied, hanging his head, trying to look remorseful. If he hadn’t had the chance to cool off with Ferox, then he might have a lot more to say. *I know, professor, you aren’t referring to any bodily harm I might have come to. That is clearly the least of your concerns, considering I had been tearing myself apart for eight years before anyone decided to intervene.*

Dumbledore, of course, didn’t know about the marauder’s secret. He may well have known about Madam Pomfrey’s efforts to help Remus, but if he did, he showed no interest.

So Remus shut up and took his punishment, hoping that eventually Dumbledore would release him and he could just go back to bed. There was a lecture on responsibility and maturity. A stern reminder that the war is bigger than him, and that his own personal motives did not matter. “We all have to make sacrifices...” (*yeah, Remus scoffed, inwardly, some more than others, presumably.*)

“Do you understand, Remus?”

“Yes, headmaster.”

After that, he had to give Dumbledore a detailed account of everything he and Livia had discussed. It wasn’t much – Remus couldn’t help feeling a little bit disappointed by how little he had learnt himself. Dumbledore seemed pleased, however – as much as Dumbledore ever seemed to be one thing or another. Several of the clocks in one of the glass cabinets began to chime, and Remus realised that it was three o’clock in the morning. He stifled a yawn.

“Yes,” Dumbledore nodded, as if Remus had just made a very interesting point, “Perhaps that is enough for tonight. You may go to bed, Mr Lupin.”

Remus nodded dozily and stood up, rubbing his hip which was stiff from sitting on hard wooden seats all evening.

“Professor?” He asked, just before leaving. Dumbledore had returned to his letter writing, and made no sign he had heard the boy, so Remus just continued anyway, “Livia said that I didn’t know half the power I had. And she could do wandless magic, and wordless magic, and—“

“Her talents were nothing out of the ordinary, Mr Lupin,” Dumbledore replied, not looking up, “She has clearly studied the dark arts, and may be particularly gifted. Do not dwell on it.”

“Ok then.” Remus replied, even more disappointed. “Is er... is Professor Ferox still here?”

“Mr Ferox is staying in Hogsmeade for a few more days. Good night, Remus.”

“Um... goodnight, headmaster.”

Professor McGonagall was waiting for him outside the office. She looked furious, but she didn't say anything.

“I'm sure you've had enough of a telling off for one night.” She said, stiffly.

“Oh,” Remus sighed, “I can take a bit more, if it'll make you feel better.”

She raised an eyebrow at him, tutted, but kept walking. When they arrived at the portrait hole, she stopped and said,

“Two month's detention, every night except full moons. And tell those boys to get to bed at once.”

He crawled through to the common room and found James, Sirius and Peter there, waiting in their pyjamas. James was pacing by the fireplace, Peter was trying not to fall sleep, leaning on his elbow, and Sirius, who had been sitting bolt upright in an armchair, leapt to his feet the moment he saw Remus.

“What do you think you're playing at?!” He shouted, striding across the room, “Running off on your own!”

“Please don't, Padfoot, I'm knackered...” Remus sighed, wincing. He was getting a headache. He just wanted to go to sleep – enough talking tonight.

“Do you have *any idea* what it was like finding out you'd sneaked off?!” Sirius shouted. Remus raised an eyebrow at him.

Sirius blinked, and stepped back, slightly, looking down. “For all of us, I mean.”

“I can imagine.” Remus said, “And I'm sorry, but please can I just go to bed? You can have a go at me in the morning.”

“Yeah, back off, Black.” James came over, and placed a hand on Sirius's shoulder. Sirius shrugged it off, agitated. James sighed, taking his glasses off. “It's late, we're all tired. You sure you're ok, Moony?”

“Fine.” Remus nodded, so, so grateful to James Potter.

Sixth Year: Negotiations

Sunday 15th January 1977

He slept as late as possible the next morning, to put off further confrontation. He couldn't talk to them, not yet, not until his head was straight. They'd have so many questions – some he couldn't answer, some he didn't want to. He showered for longer than usual – something of Livia seemed to cling to him, and he turned the tap right up, trying to scald it off. The claw marks she had left were healing already, but still itched under Remus's scratchy wool jumper.

Washed and dressed, Remus went to his trunk and looked for a spare bit of parchment, before scrawling an untidy note:

If you're still in the village, I'd like to talk to you again.

He folded it in a hurry, shoved it in his pocket and headed for the owlery. The marauders were all in the common room, in much the same state as they had been the night before. Remus looked at them, panicked, then bent his head and kept walking.

"Moony, wait..." they followed him, all three, through the portrait hole. No matter, they couldn't discuss it in the open, he knew this and they knew it.

"I'm going to the owlery." He said, marching ahead.

"Don't you want breakfast?" Peter asked.

"After."

"Moony, can we talk about what happened last night?" James asked, sounding very tired still. Remus supposed he'd been bearing the brunt of Sirius's frustration. *Good; let someone else do that for a bit.*

"Not here."

Unfortunately, they all followed him to the owlery – which happened to be completely empty – except for owls, of course, most of which were sleeping.

"Who are you writing to?" Sirius asked at once. Remus closed his eyes, sighed, and resumed tying his note to the nearest owl.

"Ferox. My old professor."

"Why?!"

Remus dropped the string he was using and tutted as he had to bend to pick it up. He continued to explain, calmly.

"He's in Hogsmeade. I saw him last night, but I want to see him again."

"What was he doing in--"

Remus tutted again, fumbling with his third attempt to tie the note to the agitated owl's leg. Sirius was standing much too close, leaning over him, demanding answers, and Remus could barely concentrate.

“He’s working with Moody, and he got summoned there to bring me back--”

“Summoned by who?”

“Fucking hell, give me a minute, will you?!” Remus snapped.

Sirius stood back, looking as if he’d very much like to say something else, but was biting his tongue. James touched his shoulder again. Remus ignored them both and tied the letter to the bird - maybe a bit too tight, because it pecked him angrily before flying off, down towards the village. He could stay there, maybe, it might not take very long. But his stomach growled. He turned to look at his friends.

“Ok. Breakfast?”

“Are you going to tell--”

“Yes, Padfoot, fine. Let’s um... get some toast and go for a walk or something, ok?”

So that’s what they did. Remus buttered at least five slices of toast in the Great Hall, wrapped them in napkins and stuffed them into the pockets of his robes. The other three marauders followed him, watching cautiously as if they weren’t quite sure what to make of him yet.

“Right.” He said, once they were outside, “You all need to shut up and let me tell it to you, ok? No interruptions.”

They nodded solemnly as they walked. He saw Sirius purse his lips. *Tough*, Remus thought, spitefully. *You can listen to me, for once*. So, he talked.

He found it much easier than telling Dumbledore – at least he knew for sure that the marauders were on his side. He tried to explain everything with as little emotional context as possible. He had known there was a werewolf nearby. He went to find them, he met Livia, Ferox intervened.

“Moody talked to me last summer,” he explained, finally, “He said something to me, and it made me... it just made me think about how useful I can be, that’s all. I have to stop looking at my furry little problem as... well, as a problem. If we’re going to war with dark creatures, then *as* a dark creature I ought to be--”

“You’re not a dark creature.” James said, suddenly, “You’re our Moony.”

Remus shrugged. He wouldn’t have put money on James being the first to interrupt, but now he was pretty glad he had. He left a pause; there was nothing more to tell. James was still looking at him, with a small crease between his eyebrows. He pushed his glasses up his nose, clearly thinking very deeply. Peter, of course, looked anxious. He was staring at his feet, rubbing his hands together. Remus didn’t look at Sirius. He looked for his fags instead.

“So,” James said, after swallowing, “She’s gone now, has she? The werewolf?”

“Livia,” Remus said, cigarette between his teeth, “Yeah, I think Ferox scared her off.”

“Too bloody right,” James nodded, much more comfortable talking action, “And I bet with Moody on the case she won’t be back any time soon, eh? So, are you in a lot of trouble? With Dumbledore?”

“I don’t think so.” Remus sighed. He rubbed his sore hip, “I think Dumbledore was more worried about me mucking up his spy ring, rather than breaking any rules.”

“He wouldn’t want to see you hurt. Any of us.” James said, sincerely. He eyed Remus’s awkward posture, “C’mon, there’s a bench down here, you can finish your toast.”

They made slow progress down towards the edge of the lake, where there were a few stone benches. It was too cold for anyone else to be out at this time on a Sunday, and Remus watched the late morning mist drift across the dark surface of the water as he chewed on the remains of his crusts. Sirius hadn’t spoken yet, since the owlery, and Remus was trying not to notice it. Sirius felt betrayed - Remus knew that as sure as he knew his own name. Betrayed even if he didn’t really have a right to feel it. *This isn’t about you.* Remus wanted to hiss at doleful, silent Sirius.

“Can’t believe we all slept through the most exciting night of the year, eh.” James nudged Remus, trying to bring a bit of levity to the otherwise rather sombre atmosphere.

“It wasn’t that exciting,” Remus grinned back, giving him what he wanted, “I was crap. If Ferox hadn’t come... I dunno.”

“D’you think she could have disappeared with you?” Peter asked, still wringing his pudgy little hands.

“I dunno.” Remus replied, “I think... I got the impression, anyway, that she needed to me agree. Like it had to be *me* who made the decision – otherwise I s’pose they could all just gang up and snatch me.”

“Well then!” James said, slapping his thigh triumphantly, “There’s no problem, is there? Well I mean, there’s no *question*.”

“No, of course not.” Remus said, quickly, “I’d never join Greyback.”

“Well then.” James repeated, satisfied.

Remus looked at his hands, still greasy from the toast. He wiped them on his trouser legs. Of course not. Of course he would never. *Except*. “Moony?” James said, sensing the odd quiet.

“I’d never join him.” Remus said, carefully. “And Livia was... she was awful, but.” He breathed in, “Not everything she said was wrong.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Sirius burst out. Remus still didn’t look at him, growing hot.

“Just that – well wizards treat us unfairly, and... and... Ugh, you lot wouldn’t understand.”

Sirius sprang up, as if he had been wound up to breaking point. He glared at Remus as if he was about to start screaming at him. Then he walked away, at an impossible pace.

“Black!” James stood up, “Oi!”

“It’s fine.” Remus waved a hand, “Sorry, I shouldn’t have said anything, I can’t explain properly.”

“He’s been such a moody git lately.” James huffed, still watching the other boy storm away.

“Go after him, if you want,” Remus said. “Honestly, you’re the best at sorting him out when he’s like that. Me and Wormy’ll find you later, yeah?”

“Ok...” James said, already moving, “Thanks, Moony!”

“Those two are so weird sometimes.” Peter said, watching James catch up. “I swear I never know what anyone’s on about any more. It’s all war this and war that...”

“Yeah, it’s a bit of a pain, innit.” Remus replied. He had meant it sarcastically, but poor Peter had never been very quick on the uptake.

“Yeah, you know what I mean, don’t you, Moony? I just think... we’re only sixteen, can’t we think about something *other* than doing the ‘right thing’ all the time? We used to have *fun*.”

Remus was only half listening. He stretched, rubbing his hip again to see if it would move for him.

“Think I might to back to bed, Pete. Or the library. Why don’t you go and see Dezzie?”

“What? You didn’t know?!” Peter stared at him incredulously as he helped Remus to his feet.

“Know what?” Remus asked, arching his back again for good measure.

“She dumped me.”

“Oh shit.” Remus blinked, “Sorry, mate! Was that last night too?”

“Last *week*.” Peter said, with an uncharacteristic coldness in his voice.

“Sorry!” Remus said again embarrassed. He didn’t think he had actually spoken to Peter about anything much in weeks – he’d been so wrapped up in Sirius, and the wolf pack, and Sirius, and Christopher... he resolved to do much better with all of his friends. After all, as soon as he turned seventeen they would be all he had. “I’m *really* sorry, Wormtail.” He said, kindly, “Want to play chess instead, then?”

* * *

Monday 16th January 1977

Remus was genuinely sorry to hear about Peter and Dezzie. She’d never really been part of their group, but she was a nice enough girl, and had made Peter happy – she had given him something that James and Sirius did not have, and that was special in itself. The breakup had ostensibly been simply down to a change in attitudes. They had been seeing each other since they were fourteen, and at sixteen it seemed that Desdemona wished to spread her wings a bit.

“She might change her mind?” Remus suggested to a glum faced Peter over their third chess game.

“Doubt it,” Peter huffed. “Reckon she’s got a crush on that Roman Rotherhide bloke. Wanker. Knight to F3.”

“I thought Mary was seeing him?”

“Mary sees everyone,” Peter sniggered, meanly. “She’s like the girl version of Padfoot.”

Ferox’s reply arrived later that Sunday evening.

Remus,

I’m afraid I can’t invite you into Hogsmeade, but I can meet you for supper on Monday evening at the castle. I’ll meet you outside the Great Hall at 6pm.

That was ok. Good enough – he could ask what he needed to ask anywhere. Remus went to his lessons as usual on Monday, and told the marauders at lunch time. Sirius was speaking to him again, but not properly. For every small step forward, he and Remus seemed to take three enormous steps back again.

"I'm having tea with Ferox tonight," he explained. "So I won't see you until later."

He knew James had quidditch practice, which Peter would be watching, now that he had no girlfriend. Sirius sat up straighter.

"Should we come too?"

"Why?" Remus asked, fixing him with a cold stare. Sirius shrugged and looked back at his soup.

By the time six o'clock rolled around, Remus was practically pacing the halls. He didn't want to look overeager, so he'd waited at the top of the landing before going down the main staircase at just one minute past the hour. This turned out to be something of a mistake. By the time he got there, Mary had found Ferox and struck up a conversation.

"Remus!" She grinned as he descended, "Look who's here!"

"It's Mr Lupin I'm here to see," Ferox smiled easily, shaking Remus's hand. It all felt very grown up.

"I'm trying to convince him to come back and teach us again," Mary explained cheerfully, "We miss him, don't we, Remus?"

"Er... yeah, of course." Remus nodded. Mary smiled at him and touched his forearm, leaning into him in a very familiar sort of way. He couldn't remember if she'd ever done that before.

"Can you wait here?" She asked Ferox, still touching Remus, "Marlene'll be down in a minute, she'd love to see you..."

"I'm afraid we need to be getting on," Ferox said, kindly, "Maybe another time, Miss MacDonald. Remus, shall we?"

Remus followed Ferox up the staircase, rather than towards the hall, leaving Mary at the bottom. "Thought we could do with a bit of privacy," Ferox murmured, "Professor Kettleburn has kindly let me borrow my old office."

Remus had only been in the Care of Magical Creatures office once since Ferox had left – to request an extension on an essay after a full moon. Kettleburn was a spartan sort of man, who had chosen not to decorate at all, but who had stacks of paperwork strewn all over the place. Ferox tidied this neatly away with a swish of his wand, before summoning drinks and two plates for supper. The food appeared just as it did in the Great Hall – ham, egg and chips tonight.

"My favourite," Ferox smiled, motioning that Remus begin eating. They tucked in quietly for a few minutes, and Remus enjoyed the novelty of sharing dinner with a friend, rather than hundreds of other people.

"So." He said, mopping up the last of his egg yolk with a chip, "I wanted to talk about Livia."

"Look at you," Ferox nodded at him, "Two years ago I could barely get you to say two words to me about yourself."

Remus shrugged,

"No time to be shy anymore, I s'pose. There's a war on."

"Don't I bloody know it." Ferox sighed. "All right, go on lad,"

“Ok.” Remus took a deep breath. “I don’t want to join her – them – Greyback. I don’t want to be a part of their... their pack, or anything like that.”

Ferox nodded, but said nothing. Remus, emboldened, continued, “But... I think I could find them easily. I think they could find *me*. And they still want me. That’s what Dumbledore wants, isn’t it? A backdoor to the werewolves. I can do that. I know what I did was stupid – and I won’t do it again, not while I’m at Hogwarts, not until I’m at least of age. But... now I know her, now I know what they’re like, I’m not afraid. I can do it.”

“I see. Has Dumbledore said—”

“No, but I’m not stupid.” Remus said, dismissively, “He hasn’t *asked* me to do anything, because he never asks. He just makes sure you know what he wants. But there are things *I* want, too.”

“And what are those?”

“I’m not signing the register, on my birthday.” Remus said, steadily. “I’m not exposing myself to the ministry. I’ve looked into it – if I do, I have to report to them for three days every month. They’ll lock me up – I assume, it’s not very clear from the information they put out. I can’t keep a job, like that. If Dumbledore needs a spy, then he needs me to be untraceable, too.”

“I see,” Ferox said again, “But—”

“I’m not finished.” Remus snapped. “Afterwards. If we win. I want amnesty for the werewolves. Even Greyback’s pack. Not Greyback, obviously, but his followers.”

“Remus, that’s completely—”

“No it isn’t.” Remus folded his arms. “You don’t know. Livia might be batshit, but she’s not wrong. A choice between freedom under Greyback or imprisonment under the ministry is an easy one to make.”

Ferox looked at him, for a very long time. Remus drank his pumpkin juice, his throat very dry. His heart was beating so fast he thought that Ferox must be able to hear it.

“These aren’t necessarily things Dumbledore can do,” Ferox said, slowly.

“Bullshit.” Remus set down his goblet, a little too hard on the desk.

“I can bring it to him.” Ferox sighed, sounding defeated, “But I can’t make promises.”

“Well,” Remus replied, coolly, “I’m seventeen in two months. So there’s the deadline.”

“Blimey.” Ferox scratched his head. He sounded impressed, rather than angry, “You don’t half remind me of Lyall, right now. What happened to the hot-headed kid always getting into scrapes?”

“I’m still hot-headed.” Remus said, simply, “I think Lyall probably was too. It’s not that I think Dumbledore can solve all my problems. But I wanted to lay all my cards on the table.”

“Fair enough.” Ferox nodded. “All’s fair in love and war, eh?”

“I wouldn’t know about that.” Remus replied.

Their plates vanished, suddenly, and then reappeared, bearing two big wedges of chocolate cake topped with fruit. They ate them quietly, both deep in thought, occasionally shooting looks at each other.

“How’s it going with Moody?” Remus asked, casually. “I s’pose you probably can’t tell me anything.”

“You suppose right,” Ferox nodded. “Moody’s well, though. Complete nutter, but glad he’s on our side.”

“And Achilles?”

“Achilles is fine.” Ferox smiled. “Staying with a friend of mine. Speaking of which – how long’s the romance been going on, eh, Lupin?”

“The what?!” Remus stared at him, wide eyed. Ferox laughed,

“With Miss MacDonald, down there? I’d have matched you better with Marlene, but I s’pose the heart wants what it wants, eh?”

“Oh!” Remus relaxed, “No, Mary’s just a friend.”

“Hm,” Ferox said, obviously not quite believing him. “What’s brought on this personality switch, then?”

“Why does it have to be about a girl? Two years is a long time.” Remus said, annoyed. “It’s not like I’ve *suddenly* changed. Look, I first said I’d help Dumbledore fight when I was fourteen.” He tried to explain. “And then last year, James Potter told us all that he planned to join, as soon as he left school, and we all said *we* would too, and I... I was always *going* to, you know, but just because James and Sirius wanted to. I never had a reason myself, really.”

“We’re *all* going to suffer, if you know who wins.” Ferox said.

“Yeah, I s’pose.” Remus nodded diplomatically. “I know that. But I meant... well I never really had much of a stake in it, before. Now I’ve met Livia, I don’t think anything’s going to be that great for me after school finishes, no matter who’s in power. I want a stake. If I live.”

“You shouldn’t compare yourself to them, Remus. The pack.”

“I can’t really help it, can I? Everybody else will. You know my friend, Sirius Black?”

“Not well,” Ferox replied, “The Potters took him in, didn’t they? I thought it was a bit odd, knowing his family.”

“Exactly!” Remus said, triumphantly, “Sirius is my best friend, and a Gryffindor, and the Potters love him – but to everyone else he’s still a Black. He’ll spend the rest of his life trying not to be, no matter how many good things he does. Because people never forget things like that – they think that *what* you are makes you *who* you are. It’s the same for me.”

Remus was struggling now to keep explaining. Ferox looked completely lost. He sighed, heavily, “I’m sorry it has to go through you. You’re the only person I know who has any weight with Dumbledore who I trust. Who trusts *me*.”

Ferox watched him again, with a steady expression.

“I will *try*, Remus. You’re asking a lot.”

Remus frowned. He thought about Livia – her bare feet, her ragged clothes; her terrible cough and the hollow look in her eyes. It was no way to live.

He might be asking for a lot. But Remus had never asked for anything before in his life. He hoped Dumbledore remembered that.

Sixth Year: Mary, Mary

Chapter Summary

CW Sex

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Mary, Mary, where you goin' to?

Mary, Mary, can I go too?

This one thing I will vow ya,

I'd rather die than to live without ya,

Mary, Mary, where you goin' to?

Friday 5th February 1977

The rest of January seemed to whizz by in a blur, and Remus just tried to get back to normal. The full moon landed early in the month, and Remus threatened to lock the marauders out of the shack if they didn't promise to stay inside this time. Eventually he knew he would weaken and allow them to begin letting him out again - but he felt that they ought to play it safe, at least for a while.

The sudden distance between Remus and Sirius was painful, and made all the more difficult by the fact that their relationship (such that it was) had been a secret all along. Remus resorted to his usual tactic, burying himself in his studies, while Sirius absorbed himself in Emmeline. He was sulking, Remus knew. And for once, he didn't blame him. The whole messy situation only proved to Remus that they had to put a stop to it as soon as they could. It was becoming impossible to stay friends, and they *needed* to be friends before anything else.

The problem was, Sirius hadn't come to him at all since that night they'd slept in the common room. Remus was terrified that this meant it was already over - that Sirius had come to the realisation on his own, and simply chosen to stop. And Remus would not allow that. It couldn't just be *finished*, without either of them saying anything about it. Surely?

You held my hand. He wanted to say. *You saw me cry.*

The day after the February full moon, Remus lay in his usual hospital bed, pondering these things. He had a cut on his arm, which Madam Pomfrey had told him to practice his healing charms on. It was very basic, but he was so tired after his transformation,

"You have to try, dear," the medi-witch said, unsympathetically, "You wanted to be able to take care of yourself after the moons, so you'll just have to learn to find the strength."

He prodded the cut, already healing by itself anyway, making another half-hearted attempt to fix it. Nothing. The marks Livia had left were dulled to pale pink now, and Madam Pomfrey thought they would probably vanish, in time, as they weren't inherently magical wounds.

“You’re welcome to leave,” she called to him, now, from her office. “If you’re just going to sit there moping... Go and see your friends.”

Remus didn’t bother telling her that it was his friends - or rather, one friend in particular - he was moping about. But he never thought twice when she gave permission for him to leave, so he got up and dressed quickly, hurrying out of the hospital wing,

“See you Tuesday!” He called, on his way out.

It was after lunch, and there was only one lesson left that day - Care of Magical Creatures - which Remus wasn’t much in the mood for. He was ahead of the rest of the class anyway, and no one would miss him. He sloped along the corridors aimlessly for a while, still thinking about Sirius and Emmeline, and how he was ever going to... *wait a minute* .

He stopped and frowned, looking at the nearest portrait. Something was very off about it. The painting depicted an elderly wizard with thinning hair and a neat little goatee peering through a large golden telescope. For some reason, he was wearing an enormous bright red curly wig. It didn’t seem to bother him - he just kept adjusting the sight on his contraption, murmuring quietly to himself. Remus snorted, and looked at the next picture along.

This one contained a group of pretty, buxom young shepherdesses tending to their flock - and *they* all had bright red wigs on too. The same with the next portrait - a witch carrying an overflowing basket of fruit, garish scarlet curls bouncing on her head. And the next - a sinister looking monk, whose red wig actually sat on top of his hood. None of the subjects of the paintings seemed at all perturbed, as Remus followed the trail of bizarre headwear to the third floor mezzanine.

“Padfoot!” Remus gasped, when he found the culprit.

Sirius was at ease, hands in his pockets, chatting casually to a painting of a giggly sea nymph in a large golden frame. When she saw Remus she gave a shriek and dived into the waves below.

“Aw, Moony, what’d you scare her for?” Sirius tutted, “I was just about to cast the spell.”

“This is brilliant!” Remus grinned, gesturing at all of the pictures he’d passed, “How come you never told me you were doing it? Is James in on it?”

“Yeah, he’s taking the east wing,” Sirius nodded, moving on to the next painting. “We just had the idea walking back to bed this morning. Sorry, thought you’d be sleeping still.”

“Madam Pomfrey let me go...”

“Oh right. You’ll probably want to go to the library, or something? I’m nearly finished here, no need for you to stick around.”

“No, I--”

“Oh shit!”

The big grandfather clock in the great hall had begun chiming - every classroom door was about to burst open, and students come pouring out for their next lesson. “They’ll know it’s us!” Sirius said, “Quick!” He pulled James’s invisibility cloak out from his robes and raised it up like a tent.

Remus hurried over to get under it, crouching slightly to compensate for their height difference. They both backed against the wall and waited. The doors began to slam open one at a time, and torrents of students filled the previously quiet space. Invisible and trapped, Remus realised that this

was the best chance he'd had in days.

"Oi," he whispered, directly into Sirius's ear. He felt the other boy tense. "Are you still angry with me?"

"What do you--"

"You're avoiding me."

"No I'm not." Sirius pushed back, suddenly, as a third year girl came a bit too close. He backed straight into Remus' chest, so that their whole bodies were now touching, practically. "James said to give you space." He murmured, " *And* you left me out of the Hog's Head mission, even after we said we'd go together."

"It wasn't a mission!" Remus whispered, struggling to keep his voice low. People were noticing the vandalised portraits now, pointing and laughing around them. "And I never agreed to go together!"

"Well it sent the message that you wanted space!" Sirius shot back. He turned around, so that he could whisper into Remus's ear too. They were still touching in some places, trying not to in others.

"I'm sorry, ok?" Remus replied, "I didn't think you'd take it so hard!"

"I'm not taking it hard!" Sirius spluttered, mortally offended, "You make me sound like--"

"Like what?" Remus challenged.

He could feel Sirius begin to pull away, so he kissed him. *Fuck it* . Thankfully, Sirius kissed him back, and as the hallways emptied once again, the noise slowly petering out, the two boys hidden in plain sight under the cloak were completely oblivious.

Finally, Sirius did pull away, and Remus allowed it.

"So now you like me again." Sirius grumbled. "Can't bloody keep up with you."

"What are you talking about? You were avoiding me!"

"I thought you wanted me to!"

"Well... yeah, ok, I did, but not until we'd at least talked."

"I really don't see what there is to talk about," Sirius threw off the cloak. His hair fell softly back into place, while Remus's was abuzz with static until he smoothed it down. "We're either doing... y'know, or we're not."

God, I love arguing with you, Remus thought, feeling the heat flare up his neck, desire for Sirius just about burning him up, *I could argue with you forever*.

"So?!" Sirius said, backing away from Remus, knocking him out of his lustful haze. "Which is it?"

"Well it's a bit unfair to ask me that right *now* ..."

Sirius bit his bottom lip and cocked an eyebrow. Remus just about died.

"C'mon, then." Sirius jerked his head, moving towards the nearest staircase, "I'm bunking off

Divination, dorm's empty..."

* * *

Thursday 10th February 1977

What a mess. By the end of the next week they were basically back to the beginning again. No talking, just touching. Sirius went out publicly with Emmeline, and at night he crept into Remus's bed - provided the coast was clear, of course. Sirius was nothing if not discreet, in this case at least. Conversely, Remus was finding that part more difficult than ever.

A few months ago it would have been fine - it *had* been fine. Just another secret to add to the list, another part of himself that he mustn't let others see. But a lot had happened since then. Lily knew he was a werewolf, for example - that had been a surprising relief. Sharing the secret with her had been a good thing; he was quite sure. Then there was Christopher, so courageous in bearing his soul, and all Remus could offer back were half-truths.

When it came down to it, Remus could face a vicious killer in a dark alley; could make demands on Dumbledore himself. But he could *not* say no to Sirius. *A real bloody mess.*

In one moment of utter weakness, Remus even found himself nearly confessing everything to James. They were in the library, looking for some obscure Defence Against the Dark Arts textbook, when Potter brought up Valentine's Day, which was looming.

"I'm asking Evans to Hogsmeade this weekend, obviously," he said cheerily, "She'll say no, for tradition's sake, but I'm winning her over, I can feel it."

"Mm." Remus sighed, running his finger along the supple leather spines of the ancient texts. It wasn't that *he* wanted celebrate Valentine's Day - it was a stupid, girly day which he wanted nothing to do with - but he resented everyone *else* wanting to do things for it.

"And Wormtail actually asked out Dorcas Meadows." James laughed, crouching down to check a lower shelf, "Can you believe that? Sometimes I think he's got more guts than any of us."

"Who's Dorcas Meadows?"

"You've met her, haven't you? Hufflepuff in our year."

Remus shrugged.

"I s'pose Sirius is taking Emmeline to Hogsmeade." He said.

"Yeah, 'spect so." James replied, pulling out a book and opening it to check the index. "Or another one of his many adoring fans, if she dumps him before then."

"Hmph."

"What?"

"Nothing." Remus shook his head, picking up a book at random and pretending to read it.

"Not being a wee bit judgemental there, are you, Moony?" James wheedled, grinning.

"No. Of course not!" Remus fought to keep a straight face, "Padfoot can do whatever he wants. But... don't you think he's... I dunno, it's a bit much, all these girls. Like he's showing off."

"It's not *loads* of girls, he's been with Emmeline since December, hasn't he?"

"January." Remus replied, archly. "He was single over Christmas."

"Well then. That's fine. The rest are just flirting. He's always liked attention."

"Yeah, but..."

"Look, you just need to let Sirius be Sirius. He's a bit of a twat sometimes, but he's had a rough time of it. Let him enjoy himself if he wants." James stood up and looked at him sideways, appraising.

"You know, Moony, wouldn't kill *you* to have a bit of fun either."

"Ha." Remus snorted.

"Oh, mate!" James leaned over his shoulder to read the book Remus had open, "Well done, you've found it!"

Have a bit of fun. So, perhaps Remus could blame it all on James - what happened next, anyway.

* * *

Saturday 12th February 1977

She'd been flirting with him for ages – Remus knew pretty well what flirting looked like, by now. In the way she smiled, head tilted downwards. The way she had started pressing a hand to his chest when he made her laugh (which definitely seemed to happen more than usual, too). That cute little wiggle girls do when they're fixing their tights. Eventually, they found themselves alone in the common room on that Hogsmeade weekend just before Valentine's Day, homework finished, sitting squashed up on the sofa – and she just *asked*. Which was more than Sirius had ever done.

Remus and Mary always been good friends; he liked her a lot. Her sunny, carefree nature had always appealed to his own gloomier side; her confidence to his introversion. He had ignored the flirting altogether, finding it mildly flattering, but otherwise uninteresting, until she decided to stay at the castle with him instead of going to Hogsmeade.

"How come you're not on a date, anyway?" Remus asked, as they signed off the last few notes for their History essays.

"I wanted to spend time with you," she smiled at him, settling back into the couch, her thigh touching his. "Can't have you here all lonely."

"I'm not as much fun as Roman Rotherhide, I bet," Remus laughed, still not quite believing the direction this was going. Her hand was on his knee. Was she going to leave it there? Oh crikey, no, she wasn't...

"Well I don't know about that," she said, her voice low, leaning into him now as her long fingers moved slowly upwards, "I'd like to judge for myself..." she blinked slowly, and leaned in, kissing him softly on the lips. He was frozen to the spot. She smiled cheekily, "Well? Do you fancy it?"

She was very pretty. He wasn't as close to her as he was with Lily, so really, he reasoned – where was the harm? Whatever was going on with Sirius clearly didn't mean neither of them could look elsewhere. And if *Sirius* could do it, then so could he. Only fair.

He led her upstairs.

“You’re lovely,” she whispered, lying on his bed, eyes dark. He ran his hand up her soft thigh. Between her legs she was slick like warm oil.

Afterwards, he wasn’t sure what to make of it. It was certainly nothing to complain about – she was gorgeous, and the blood heat of her around him was definitely very exciting. But it wasn’t the same as those dark furtive nights with Sirius; had none of the rich complexity, the sure understanding. Mary’s soft jelly breasts were no substitute for Sirius’ firm grip. Her sweet panting sighs did not arouse him in the same way as Sirius’ hot, rasping groans.

All things said and done, while Remus was certainly glad to have had the experience, he didn’t think it was something he was much interested in repeating.

* * *

Sunday 13th February 1977

Only a day after the Mary experiment, Sirius was back. It was mid-afternoon, but James and Peter were both in the library studying for an upcoming Muggle Studies exam. It began as ever, in silence and quiet, desperate need. Sirius was clutching and pulling at Remus’s clothes – then he rolled over and seemed to stop. He sniffed the pillow.

“Is that...? That smells like...” he inhaled again. “Mary’s perfume?”

“Yeah,” Remus replied, uneasily. He had just removed his shirt and was feeling exposed already, not sure if they were stopping altogether or just making casual conversation. “She was here. Yesterday.”

“Oh. Right. You and her?”

“Well... it was just a one off sort of thing. Is that... ok?”

“Yeah,” Sirius’ eyes clouded over slightly, as if his mind was working extra fast. “Yeah, of course. Good for you, mate!”

“I know you two were... but it was ages ago now, and you’re with Emmeline, so...”

“Of course! I’m pleased for you, honestly, Mary’s great!”

“Yeah, she is.”

There were a few moments of silence and Remus considered putting his shirt back on. But then Sirius leaned over, his expression changing, like a storm passing. He touched the scar that started at Remus’ collar bone, dragged his finger down along its ragged path to his naval. Remus shivered.

“So, how was it?”

“Wh-what?” Remus just wanted to close his eyes, relax under Sirius’ long fingers.

“Sex.” Sirius said.

Remus’s eyes opened, confused. He wanted to *know*?!

“It was... good. She’s, um... so soft, y’know. I mean, you *know* ...”

“Yeah,” Sirius breathed into his neck, half on top of him now, his hand working Remus’ belt.

Afterwards they sat beside each other and all Remus wanted to do was lay his head on Sirius's burning chest and close his eyes and just *be* . But he didn't. He stared at his friend, who was already lighting a cigarette, skin still pink and shining, and thought to himself, ruefully – *this will never be enough* .

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Mary' by The Monkees.

Sixth Year: Heniokhos

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Friday 4th March 1977

"I'm going to go mad." Marlene said, one evening, as the library was closing. She pressed her fingers into her eyes, exhausted. Her hair was fluffed up on her head like a dandelion from running her hands through it so often. "I thought the OWLs were bad..."

"That rhymes," Mary sang, cheerfully, neatly rolling up her parchment.

"Helpful, thanks, MacDonald." Marlene rolled her eyes.

"*You* decided to keep Potions." Mary bopped her friend lightly on the head with her rolled up essay.

"It's a requirement for Healer training college." Marlene sighed. "I *wish* I didn't have to do it."

"I don't know why you all hate it so much," Lily yawned, hoisting her satchel onto her shoulder, "Potions is fun, it's logical."

"Oh, shut up, Evans." Mary and Marlene said in unison.

Remus laughed, and put a fond arm around the redhead,

"Poor Lily," he said, in mock sympathy, "So misunderstood in your quest for knowledge."

She laughed too, and they all left the library together. They'd been there every night of the week - except when Lily had prefect duties or Marlene had quidditch; then it was just Remus and Mary. Which was surprisingly ok - Mary had made a few teasing jibes about their brief liaison, but hadn't mentioned wanting to do it again, and appeared to be seeing Roman Rotherhide once more. Remus was relieved. One secret affair was quite enough.

It was early to be revising, but the four of them had decided to reconvene their study group this year in order to get through the first stage of their NEWTs. Final exams were still over a year away, but in Remus and Lily's opinion, there was no such thing as being too prepared, particularly with the foundation year exams due in June.

"I'm knackered," Mary said, as they approached the portrait of the fat lady (her wig had been removed by Professor Flitwick only a few days beforehand - she had apparently grown quite fond of it). "Day off, tomorrow?"

"If you want," Remus said, catching her yawn, "I said I'd do a big study group on Sunday, so I'd be glad of the rest."

"I don't know how you do it, Lupin," Mary shook her head in disbelief. "That's perfect, though, leaves Saturday evening free."

"Got another date with Roman, have you?" Marlene asked, sounding a bit annoyed.

"Yes, Marlene," Mary rolled her eyes, "Despite your *very apparent* disapproval..."

"I just think you ought to slow down, that's all!" Marlene snapped, running her fingers through her hair again.

"Well, as we've discussed before, it's none of your business who I go out with, is it?!" Mary said, arching an eyebrow at her friend. Marlene had turned an uncharacteristic shade of hot pink, and was looking at the floor. Remus looked at both girls in surprise. He'd never seen them talk like that to each other before - usually they were the best of friends.

"Come on, we're all tired," Lily said, pushing forward, "*Blatherskite*," she addressed the fat lady, who moved aside so they could all enter.

"Evans!" James's shout met them even before they were halfway through.

"Yeah yeah, good evening, Potter," Lily sighed, shaking her head. Remus caught her tiny smile, though she tried to cover it behind her long hair.

"And Moony!" James continued, "Where are you been?"

"Making furious love to us all, obviously," Mary said, deadpan, pushing Sirius aside to sit nearest the fireplace.

"It's true," Lily grinned, sitting on the hearth rug, "He's a stallion."

"It took all three of us to satisfy him!" Marlene piped up, looking a little bit happier.

"Oh my god, please shut up..." Remus groaned, taking his seat in his usual armchair. "We were in the library, as if you didn't know."

"Ah, of course," James winked at him. "Say no more, Casanova."

"Brr." Mary held her hands up to the fire, "This castle is freezing."

"*Scotland* is freezing." Sirius replied, monotonously. He was levitating a paper plane lazily about the room, slouched down in his chair.

"It's only March," Lily said, perkily, "It'll start warming up soon enough. I can't wait for the summer."

"Nah, then I'll be too hot," Mary sighed, "Our flat is ridiculous, even if you open all the windows. S'pose I can do magic this year, though - am I allowed to if my family are muggles?"

"Oh, I do," Lily said, biting her lip, "Are we not supposed to?"

"Why don't you come and stay with me, Mary?" Marlene said, "More room at our house, it's cooler."

"Well I wouldn't mind a holiday," Mary mused, still rubbing her hands. "Haven't had once since dad lost his job. We used to go to the seaside every year. Margate or Skegness."

"Ooh, I went to Cornwall last year," Lily said, "It was lovely, we camped right near the beach."

"Camping again." Sirius grumbled. "Don't get Potter started..."

"Evans, have I ever told you how much *love* camping?" James said, grinning madly from his position at the mantelpiece. He was fiddling with his golden snitch, tossing it from palm to palm, "It is one of my greatest pleasures in life."

"I'm talking about muggle camping, Potter," Lily tutted, smoothing her skirt over her knees self-consciously, "In muggle tents – no fancy extension charms..."

"Can't be that different," James replied, undeterred, "These two haven't even been camping," he nodded to Remus and Sirius.

"We *sort of* did, over Christmas," Remus said, throwing a daring glance at Sirius, who gave him a slow, conspiratorial smile.

"Hey!" James said, suddenly, tossing the snitch high in the air, then reaching to snatch it back, "We should all go camping!"

"What?" Sirius said, sitting up.

"This summer!" James nodded, excited, "It's our last summer before we all have to be grownups – *and* we'll all be of age, we should do it!"

"All of us?" Marlene asked, eyeing Mary.

"All of us," James confirmed. "What'd you think, Evans?"

"Well..." Lily looked up at him, "Separate tents for boys and girls, right?"

"Pfft, you're no fun." Mary smirked. Lily kicked her from the floor, and continued,

"Ok, Potter – on one condition..."

"Anything!"

"Muggle tents."

"Oh."

* * *

Saturday 5th March 1977

If you are seventeen years of age, or will turn seventeen on or before the 31st of August 1977, you are eligible for a twelve-week course of Apparition Lessons from a Ministry of Magic Apparition instructor, beginning on Monday 4th April 1977.

Please sign below if you would like to participate.

Cost: 12 Galleons.

Remus stared up at the notice in pinned to the Gryffindor notice board and sighed.

"I'll lend you the money." Sirius said, at his shoulder.

"I'd rather you didn't."

"Remus, I'm ridiculously rich."

"I'm quite aware of that." He snapped, irritably. He looked at the board again. Remus had wanted to learn how to apparate for almost his entire time at Hogwarts. "Ok." He nodded, "But I'll pay you back. I really will."

"I know," Sirius nudged him with his hip, playfully. "You're going to be making more money than any of us, one day, you big swot."

"Ha." Remus snorted. "Not likely, unless Dumbledore gets his act together."

"Dumbledore? What's he got to do with anything?"

Remus looked around, furtively. The common room wasn't busy, but it wasn't empty either.

"I can't tell you here." He said, "Upstairs?"

Sirius cocked his head, with a mock innocent expression that made Remus burst out laughing,

"*Not* for that. Get your mind out of the gutter, Black."

They headed up to the bedroom. It was nice and quiet there – Peter was serving a detention somewhere with Filch and James was patrolling.

"So?" Sirius went straight for Remus's bed, sitting cross legged and alert, "What's going on with Dumbledore?"

Remus sat down opposite him, not too close.

"I... remember I had that dinner with Ferox? After I met Livia."

"...yeah, of course." Sirius sobered up at once. They hadn't discussed it, since they'd made up.

"Ok, well don't get angry with me, but... I sort of made some demands. On Dumbledore."

Sirius stared at him, blankly. Remus continued, with a hard swallow, "I told him that if they want me to help them, if they want me to be like an emissary to the werewolves, or whatever, then I wanted something in return. Protection, for the others in Greyback's pack, first of all,"

Sirius opened his mouth, then – apparently thinking better of it – closed it again, and waited. Remus carried on, watching him carefully for any sign of anger or disapproval, "And I've asked not to be forced to sign the register, on my birthday."

"Well, that's reasonable, at least," Sirius breathed. "But, Moony... the other thing..."

"I know," Remus nodded, "They're murderers, some of them. I know that. But they're... I don't think they know any other way. I think that if we want to show them that there are other choices, better ways to live, then... that has to start with kindness."

"Kindness." Sirius repeated.

"Not forgiveness," Remus said, quickly, "I'm not saying they should go *completely* unpunished, but... I mean, you have to admit, the ministry has handled lycanthropy pretty poorly, so far. When we win this war, there's a chance to make things better. For *all* wizards. Even half-breeds."

Sirius was looking back at him, his brow very slightly furrowed. His deep blue eyes focussed intensely, as if he was searching for something in Remus's face. Then he gave a slight nod.

"This is really important to you, isn't it?"

"Yes." Remus said, without missing a beat.

“You’ll have to convince *a lot* of people.”

Remus nodded.

“I know.”

“We’ll help you, though.” Sirius said, not breaking eye contact. “Me and Peter and James – Evans too, probably, that girl worships you.”

“I couldn’t ask--”

“You don’t need to,” Sirius shook his head. He leaned forward and kissed Remus so, so gently on the lips, barely a whisper. “*Anything* for our Moony.”

Later that day, Remus was on his way to Flitwick’s classroom – the kindly Charms professor had allowed him to use it for his tutoring sessions, provided everything was tidied up afterwards. He had a map of the south coast in his bag, and was hoping to get there early enough to have the chance to study it. If they were all going on holiday that summer, then *someone* was going to have to organise it.

The first full moon of the summer would fall on the first of July, and Remus was hoping to stay one extra night at Hogwarts for that. He had already asked James if he could stay with the Potters for the following week, and James, of course, had eagerly agreed. Then they would have the camping trip, and then... Remus didn’t have a clue what his next move would be. Back to Mile End, maybe; if Grant was still there. He couldn’t just stay at the Potter’s forever; not once he was seventeen.

“Hiya Remus!” Christopher waved, already waiting outside the classroom. Remus’s heart sank, slightly. Of course Christopher was early. He never missed a chance to catch Remus alone.

“Morning, Chris,” he smiled, politely. “Shall we go in?”

They charmed the desks into a horseshoe shape, so that there would be plenty of room for practical demonstrations, then settled down, pulling out their books.

“What are you doing after?” Christopher asked, over keen.

“Dinner.” Remus said, mildly, smoothing down his map and locating Cornwall. “Then detention, I’m afraid. ‘til late.” It was a full moon – though he’d be in detention even if it wasn’t. McGonagall never went back on a punishment.

“That’s a shame,” Christopher sighed, “You’re always in detention these days.”

“Yep,” Remus laughed, “I’m a no-good yob.”

Christopher laughed, awkwardly. He meant well enough, but Remus had the impression that he was rarely comfortable with marauder style humour. It took getting used to.

“Have you read this?” Christopher pushed a book across the desk, covering up the beach Remus had been inspecting. He sighed and looked at it. *The Charioteer* .

“Nope,” Remus shook his head, picking it up and reading the blurb.

After an injury at Dunkirk, Laurie Odell is sent to a veterans' hospital to convalesce. There he befriends Andrew, a conscientious objector serving as an orderly. But when Ralph, a mentor from

his school days, reappears in his life, Laurie is forced to choose between the sweet ideals of innocence and the distinct pleasures of experience.

Oh , Remus thought. *It's that sort of book.*

"It's a muggle book." Christopher explained, excitedly, "It's really good. You can borrow it, I'd love to know what you think!"

"Yeah, I'll give it a go, cheers." Remus nodded, quickly hiding it in the bottom of his bag before anyone else came in.

At that moment, there was a knock at the door. Both boys turned around to see Emmeline Vance poke her head around the door. She was an immensely beautiful girl, with a tumble of golden curls and large apple green eyes. Another Ravenclaw, she was a seventh year too, and had previously gone out with Roman Rotherhide himself. She smiled, stepping in,

"Hello, Remus," she said, in her soft, girlish voice. He tried to be polite back, but he knew he sounded cold.

"Hello Emmeline. I didn't expect you."

"Oh, no, I'm not here for your little study club thing," she smiled again, scrunching up her nose in a way that might have seemed cute or endearing to anyone but Remus and Christopher. "I was hoping Sirius would be here."

"He isn't."

"No, I see that!" She laughed, throatily, sweeping her hair over one shoulder. "But he said he'd meet me in the Astronomy tower half an hour ago..."

Remus just shrugged at her, face blank. She tutted. "Well, if you see him, will you tell him to meet me tonight, after curfew?"

"He's busy tonight."

"Doing what?! Ugh, he's not seeing that MacDonald girl again, is he?"

"You never, know, with Sirius," Remus said, cruelly, trying not to smirk.

"Well. You tell him that if he's not careful he's going to lose me!"

"Oh, I definitely will."

She closed the door, and Remus snorted, shaking his head.

"Do you actually know where he is?" Christopher asked, with a small frown.

"Nah," Remus replied, "But I could guess. He's probably with James somewhere."

"Those two." Christopher sighed, "They're funny, sometimes, but they cause so much trouble. How on earth Potter managed to end up a prefect I have no idea. And Black, he's just..."

"He's just what?!" Remus said, sharply.

Christopher blinked, startled.

“I know he’s your friend! Sorry, I just meant... he’s an arrogant tosser sometimes.”

“Yeah,” Remus nodded, loosening up. He thought about Sirius’s promise, made little more than an hour ago on Remus’s bed. If other people couldn’t see *that* Sirius, then it was their loss. Who were Emmeline and Christopher in the grand scheme of things?

Not marauders; not important.

“You’re not wrong.” Remus shrugged. “Right, where do you want to start?”

Chapter End Notes

'The Charioteer' by Mary Renault was published in 1953.

Sixth Year: Seventeen

Chapter Summary

Some heavy drinking, angsty arguing and throwing up in this chapter.

Thursday 10th March 1977

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY, REMU!”

Three gangly, noisy, highly excitable teenage boys jumped onto Remus’s bed at the crack of dawn. It was not the same as when they were eleven. For one thing, Remus’s legs were a lot longer; for another, they were all much heavier.

“*Gerroff* you wankers,” Remus grumbled, “What time is it?”

“Time is immaterial,” James said, wearing a brightly coloured pointed party hat, “It’s your *birthday*.”

“Your seventeenth birthday!” Sirius added, wearing a polka dot party hat at a rakish angle on his head.

“You’re *of age*!” Peter said, lunging at Remus with a fourth hat, snapping the elastic under his chin.

Remus glared at them all, stony faced.

“You’re going to make me wear this all day, aren’t you?”

They nodded, all three, in perfect unison, the streamers on their conical headwear bobbing and flashing in the dull morning light.

“It’s impervious to water,” Sirius explained cheerfully, “So you can even shower with it on.” He winked, and Remus hoped he wasn’t blushing. Sirius had been in his bed only hours before, for a very different reason, and Remus was finding the quick transitions harder and harder to deal with.

Only half an hour later, and Remus had showered (hat still firmly on his head), opened about fifty birthday cards wishing him many happy returns (“I didn’t think I *knew* fifty people!”) and eaten a generous slice of Mrs Potter’s chocolate cake.

“And you’ll get your *proper* present later,” James said, cryptically, “At the party.”

“You lot are mad,” Remus said, as they filed down into the common room, “You shouldn’t go to all this trouble.”

“Shut up, Moony.” Peter said, good naturedly.

“Happy birthday Remus!” The girls chorused in the dining hall. They were all wearing party hats too, apparently thanks to Lily’s persuasiveness.

“Nice one, Evans,” James winked at her, giving her a sly nod with his elbow, “New you wouldn’t

let the side down.”

“Oh, bugger off, Potter,” she elbowed him back, looking very pleased and a bit flushed.

The usual three round rendition of ‘Happy Birthday’ accompanied Remus’s birthday breakfast, and he was so used to it by now that he even stood up and gave a shy bow once they’d finally finished. Then the owls arrived.

There was a card from Ferox, which was unexpected - Remus hadn’t been sure if they were still on speaking terms after their last meeting. There was also a note from Dumbledore.

He cracked the cherry red seal quickly under the table, and read it as fast as possible.

Mr Lupin,

Many happy returns for the day.

I understand we have a few things to discuss. Please present yourself at the headmaster’s office at 4pm this afternoon.

Sincerely,

Albus Dumbledore.

“Here we go.” He sighed, under his breath. Sirius, who had an annoying habit of reading over his shoulder, leaned in,

“Do you want someone to go with you?”

Remus shook his head, but smiled at Sirius, trying to be kind,

“Nah. Thanks for offering, but I think it’s better if I do it alone.”

Sirius nodded, looking troubled all the same.

The day passed slowly, the meeting with Dumbledore lurking at the end of it like some malevolent spider. Remus tried imagining the scenario over in his head – coming up with a script, or at least *something* coherent to say in defence of his wild demands. Nothing came to him, and at 3.45pm that afternoon he found himself walking to the headmaster's office very slowly indeed.

He’d been mad to even suggest this in the first place. No one else needed as reason to help in the war effort – *James* would never do it. But then, Remus supposed, there was nothing James wanted that Dumbledore could give him. Unless Dumbledore held the key to Lily Evans’s undying love.

He found the staircase already open, and ascended just as slowly, remembering only at the very last minute to rip the party hat from his head.

“Good afternoon, Mr Lupin. Happy birthday.”

Dumbledore was sitting at his desk, as usual. This time he wasn’t writing letters; he was waiting patiently, a benign smile on his face.

“Thanks,” Remus replied, warily, sitting down in the chair opposite. He thought for a moment before saying, “D’you mind just calling me Remus?”

“As you wish,” Dumbledore nodded. He seemed to be in good humour. “How does it feel, coming of age?”

“It’s ok.”

“I have a few things for you, sent on to me from Mrs Orwell.”

“Matron?!”

“Indeed.” Dumbledore gestured at a shoebox, which seemed to have appeared on the large mahogany desk out of thin air. “I believe there are a few items in there which belong to you, which were held in trust at St Edmund’s.”

“Oh, wow...” Remus touched the lid of the box, tentatively, but didn’t open it. He wanted to be alone for that.

“There is also that matter of your inheritance.”

“My what?!”

“Your father left a will. He left some provisions for your mother, and the rest to you. He was not a wealthy man, I should say, but nevertheless, his vault in Gringott’s now belongs to you.”
Dumbledore pulled a key from his pocket and passed it across the desk.

Remus held it in his hand, and thought about Lyall – who had not been on his mind in some months.

“Thank you.” He said, remembering his manners.

“And there are other legal matters, as well you know.” Dumbledore clasped his hands in front of him, long slender fingers intertwined. He was waiting for a response.

“The register.” Remus said.

“The register.” The headmaster agreed. He pulled out a piece of parchment and pushed that across the desk too. It was a form.

Ministry of Magic: Declaration of Lycanthropic Infection.

Remus felt queasy. There was a dotted line at the bottom, awaiting his signature. He sat on his hands and looked at Dumbledore.

“What do you want me to do with it?”

“Leo Ferox led me to believe that you already had a very good idea of what to do with it, Remus.” The old man replied, his eyes serious. “You are an adult, I leave it in your hands.”

Remus picked up the parchment immediately, held it up to eye level and tore it clean in two. Dumbledore smiled again. “Admirably done.”

“Ferox told you something else, though.” Remus said, trying to maintain eye contact but finding it extremely difficult. Dumbledore was not like anyone else - he smelled just as strongly of magic as every other witch or wizard, but nothing else. He had no unique signifier at all.

“He did. I think, perhaps, you can anticipate my response.”

Remus felt something deflate inside of him, making room for the coming rage.

“So it’s a no.” He said, flatly.

Dumbledore inclined his head, gently,

“Not entirely. A request for patience, perhaps.”

“With respect,” Remus heard the hardness in his own voice, and it surprised him, but made him braver, “There isn’t time for patience.”

“There never is, when one is young.” Dumbledore replied, softly. “Remus, I know how things must seem to you, believe me.”

“You didn’t see her. They’re suffering. Right now.”

“Many people are suffering, Remus. You have spent precious little time in the wizarding world yet—”

“Whose fault is that?!” Remus muttered fiercely. Dumbledore gave him a silencing glance,

“But once you *have*, you will see, you will understand why attitudes are a very long way from changing. What you are asking—”

“What about what YOU’RE asking?!” Remus shouted, incandescent, “Of Ferox, and Moody and the Potters and---”

“I am asking for an enormous leap of faith!” Dumbledore said very loudly – he didn’t shout; you couldn’t call it shouting at all – but it was no longer kind. “From many people. And I will *keep* asking until the war is won. That must be our focus, for now.”

“I *want* to win the war,” Remus said, still trying to control his volume, “As much as anyone. But I want something *worth* winning, too.”

“In time. When we have the resources. When we have the strength to fight another battle.”

“I want a promise.”

“I’m aware of that.” Dumbledore said, his voice changing almost imperceptibly, a deep frown lining his forehead. “I cannot give you one.”

“Fine.” Remus stood. “Then I’m promising *you*. I’m not giving up.”

He was furious, and Dumbledore had the gall to smile at him.

“I would expect no less from Lyall Lupin’s son.”

Remus wanted to scream *fuck you*, but decided that as he’d already been disowned from one institution today, it was probably best to avoid any risk on expulsion. He grabbed the shoebox, turned and marched out.

Remus was practically blind with rage as he pelted down the spiral staircase from Dumbledore’s office, shoebox under his arm, head bowed, so that he ran straight into Sirius waiting at the bottom.

“Woah!” Sirius said, pushing both hands against Remus’s chest in an attempt to slow him down, “What’s up, Moony?”

“What are you doing here?” Remus snarled.

“Just waiting for you – I know you didn’t want company, I just thought--”

“You never bloody listen!” Remus ranted, pushing past. Sirius grabbed his arm and wouldn’t let go, allowing Remus to half drag him along the corridor,

“I know, I’m terrible,” he was saying, jogging slightly to keep up with Remus’s longer strides, “Never do as I’m told, do I? Keep shouting at me, I deserve it – hey, want to hit me?”

Remus stopped and looked at him, the mercurial grin on his face. That Sirius Black grin.

“No. I don’t want to hit you.”

“Oh good. Want to punch a wall?”

“No.” Remus carried on walking, a bit slower.

“Want to get stoned?”

“No.”

“Drunk?”

“...Maybe.”

“Perfect!” Sirius said. they were now walking at a regular pace, towards the dining hall, “Because I think that’s what half the school has in mind after dinner. What’s in the box?”

“It’s...” Remus held it on both hands, now. It wasn’t very heavy, there couldn’t be much. He could feel leaves of paper sliding around inside. “Just some stuff, I think my dad left to me. I’m not opening it until later.”

Sirius shrugged, easily,

“Fair enough.”

* * *

Sirius’s general loveliness continued through dinner – sausages and mash with onion gravy – until desert, when Emmeline appeared. Remus had been halfway to a good mood when she showed up at their table and squeezed herself onto Sirius’s lap. She kissed him, full on the mouth, for a long time.

“Happy birthday, Remus,” she smiled politely, once they had finished.

He nodded in response, and set down his spoon. She didn’t seem to notice. “I’m *so* excited about the party.” She said, generally, to the table.

“Should be good,” James said, jovially, “Moony’s birthdays always are.”

“Why *does* everyone call you Moony, anyway?” Emmeline asked, looking at Remus. He scowled at her,

“Not everyone. Just my friends.”

She blinked, and frowned, the creases in her brow marring her beauty only momentarily. Sirius squeezed her waist,

“Hey, Em, why don’t I meet you later? We’ve got some stuff to do to get ready.”

“Ok,” She smiled again, “Remember your promise...” she snogged him again.

“Promise?” Remus asked, upstairs in their bedroom, fifteen minutes later. James and Peter were overseeing the decorations in the common room, and Sirius had made up some excuse for not helping. “What did you promise her?”

“Oh, just that I’d walk her back to her common room after the party.”

Remus raised an eyebrow,

“Via the Astronomy Tower?”

Sirius laughed, unbuttoning his shirt to change,

“Maybe. Why?”

“Nothing.” Remus sat on his bed. The shoebox was still unopened, on his bedside table. He wasn’t going to look today. Maybe not even tomorrow.

“What about you and Mary?” Sirius asked, selecting a clean black shirt from his messy chest of drawers, “That thing finished now, or what?”

“Yeah.” Remus nodded, watching him. *This is it*, he thought, *this is when you tell him*. “It was just an experiment, sort of. ...Do you know what I mean?”

“Hm?” Sirius murmured, more focussed on buttoning up his shirt. “What, wasn’t good?”

“It was ok. Not as good as...” he swallowed, and said it fast, “Not as good as when it’s just you and me.”

Sirius looked up from his buttons, staring at Remus across the room. Remus was grateful for the distance. Sirius’s expression was hard to read, so Remus pressed on. “Is it like that for you?”

Sirius returned to his dresser, looking for jeans now. His back turned, he said quietly.

“Yeah.”

“Pardon?” Remus said, raising his voice.

Sirius sighed, but didn’t turn around. He closed the drawer, apparently deciding that the jeans he had on would do.

“I said yeah. It’s better with you.”

“Right.” Remus was so surprised by this response that he couldn’t think of anything else to say. Unfortunately, this gave Sirius an opportunity to speak instead. He turned, sweeping his long hair back over his head, casually.

“I s’pose because we know each other so well, eh? Right, I’d better get down there and help before

Prongs comes after me with a jelly-legs jinx! We'll send Peter to get you when it's all ready."

With that, Sirius disappeared down the stairs.

* * *

Four hours later, and Remus was well and truly drunk. Not drunk, *pissed*. Bladdered. Trollied. *Paralytic*. He couldn't remember how much he'd had, and he didn't care. He was going to have a good time if it killed him. Fuck Dumbledore. Fuck Greyback, Ferox, Livia, Emmeline and Sirius fucking Black. The party was in full swing, everyone now wearing a shiny pointy birthday hat, bopping along to the blaring music. Remus hadn't even minded the disco tracks.

He staggered to his arm chair and sank into it with yet another bottle of something lovely and strong. He was feeling very warm and very sleepy. Lazily, he allowed his gaze to wander to Sirius, chattering by the turntable, hips slouched forward *just so*. Remus let himself stare for just a little bit. He was entitled. Their first kiss was exactly a year ago. It was a silly little anniversary, considering everything that had happened in between, but Remus felt a small purr of satisfaction all the same. *Fucking prick*.

"Him and Emmeline have been together a while now." Lily said to Remus, coming to sit on the armrest. Her eyes were wide and unfocused, she had an easy smile. Remus carefully took control of his facial features and smiled back at her as if he hadn't a care in the world.

"You sound surprised."

"Well, I am a bit. I didn't see him as the sort of bloke who wants a *regular* girl."

Remus shrugged, because he couldn't speak without saying too much. Lily carried on regardless. "And – I know it sounds horrible, and I know he's your friend, so juss tell me to shuddup, but I did sort of think... y'know, that he's only goin' out wif her to upset his family."

"Whaddyou mean?" Remus asked, taking a very long swig from his firewhisky.

"Ohh, y'know," Lily slurred, maybe even drunker than he was, "Evr'y one knows Black's on a weird crusade 'gainst his mum... never goes wif pureblood girls. There was *Mary*..." she started counting Sirius's conquests off on her fingers, "she's muggleborn... Evangelina, Florence, Avni... now Emmeline."

"Might just be a coincidence." Remus was worried he might not be able to control his voice much longer; it was getting horribly high and nervous.

"Pfff." Lily laughed, spilling some of her own drink. "Sssssrus Black never does *anyfin* by coincidence. Issss alllll calculated wif him." She chuckled to herself, raising her goblet to her lips, "He'd shag a vampire if there was one at Hogwarts."

Remus stood up very suddenly, knuckles cracking. Lily almost fell off the arm of the couch in fright,

"Wassup?" She asked, confused, looking blearily up at him.

"I'm... I'm going to be sick." Remus said, realising that he really was. He bolted away and up the stairs as fast as he could and stumbled into the bathroom just in time, retching into the toilet bowl.

He rocked back on his ankles, sweating and cold. He'd drunk too much, now he just wanted to lie down and sleep and not think about anything. Remus brushed his teeth and washed his face in cold

water. He felt less queasy, but no less sober. He pulled on his pyjama bottoms and opened the door.

Sirius was standing on the other side, leaning against his bed post, with his hands in his pockets. He looked so thoroughly himself. Their eyes met and held. Sirius broke first.

“Came up to check you’re all right.”

Remus closed the door behind him, stepping forward.

“Yeah,” he replied, warily, “Just a bit too pissed, that’s all. Going to bed.”

“Look, about the stuff I said,” Sirius started. Remus braced himself, not sure what was coming. “I’m really sorry.” Sirius said, helplessly. “I don’t even know why I am but... I’m just *sorry*, ok?”

He placed a hand on Remus’ shoulder, seemingly in an apologetic gesture. It was hot on Remus’ bare skin, but he didn’t shrug it away. He just hoped that they might finally part, and he could go to bed. Sirius would return downstairs to the party. But instead, Sirius kissed him. Feeling a fool, Remus kissed him back, hungrily, toothpaste and whisky.

Sirius pushed forward, stumbling slightly, and leaned heavily on Remus, gripping both his shoulders now. Remus pulled away, suddenly remembering what was wrong.

“You’re drunk.” He said.

“Yeah,” Sirius slurred, grinning, “So’re you.”

“Yeah,” Remus agreed. He pulled back, leaving Sirius to balance by himself. He rubbed the back of his head. “I don’t think we should... I think you’ll regret it.”

“Since when do you care?” Sirius purred, leaning in again. Remus stepped back, sharply, pressing his hand to Sirius’ chest to keep him at bay.

“No, Sirius. What about Emmeline?”

Sirius shook his head dizzily, frowning.

“Fuck Emmeline!” He grunted. Remus rolled his eyes,

“But you already *do*, don’t you, Black? That’s the problem.”

“So...” Sirius spoke slowly, mind foggy with drink, “We have to stop our... thing, just because of her?”

“Our ‘thing’!? God, Sirius, you’re unbelievable.”

“What?!”

“Siiiiiiiiriuuuuuuuus...” Emmeline’s tipsy voice echoed up the staircase, “Where are youuuuuuu?”

They both turned, looking down into the shadows.

“You’d better go to her.” Remus said, walking over to his bed. Sirius followed him like a lost puppy, pulling at the waistband of his pyjama bottoms needily.

“C’mon, just...”

“No!”

“Siiiiiriuuuuuuus.... I’m coming to get you!”

Remus pushed him away one last time,

“Go on, I don’t want her up here!”

Sirius stared at him for a bit longer, drink still blurring his reactions, making him slow and stupid.

“Ok, but I’ll come back... we can talk...”

“No.” Remus said, again. “We’ve talked. It’s over. Goodnight, Sirius.”

Sixth Year: Separation

Chapter Summary

This chapter has spoilers for the ending of 'The Charioteer' by Mary Renault, which I recommended in a previous chapter.

Remus woke up the next morning with a hangover and an enormous sense of relief. He'd had to be drunk to do it, but it was done. No more jealousy, no more worrying, no more anxious questioning. The key now, he decided, was maintaining a distance, and building barriers.

By the time he had finished his shower on the morning after his seventeenth birthday, Remus had a plan of action. He would close the door on whatever his relationship with Sirius had been - it was fine to look upon Christmas as a fond memory, or to feel a little bit lonelier, a little less whole - but this was entirely necessary, both for his health and his sanity.

Sirius was not the whole world, as much as he might seem it sometimes.

Remus had demonstrated this almost immediately. Upon exiting the bathroom, he bumped into James - who looked as though he hadn't touched a drop of liquor the night before, despite having had just as much as everyone else. That infuriating Potter good fortune apparently applied to hangovers, too.

"Morning, Moony!" He grinned, rosy cheeked in his quidditch robes. Today was not a practice day, but why should that stop James? He raised his broom, "Fancy a spin around the pitch?" This was an old joke - he always asked, and Remus always pulled a face.

Remus glanced at the two made beds, and the two with the curtains still closed, where (presumably) Peter and Sirius were still fast asleep.

"Yeah." Remus said. "Go on, then."

"Eh?!" James stopped in his tracks.

Remus nodded, casually,

"I'll go with you. I ought to get better at flying, might be useful when we finish school. I've got your old broom somewhere, let me dig it out..."

Credit to James, after his initial surprise he was all for the idea, and even held his tongue when he saw the state of Remus's dusty, neglected broomstick. He simply offered to polish it, then led Remus down to the quidditch pitch jabbering about simple, basic exercises to 'get your confidence up'.

And it wasn't awful. James was a very patient teacher, and Remus felt in safe hands - the bespectacled boy didn't even laugh after the third time he fell off. Afterwards, Remus felt he even understood James a little better. It was a very wholesome feeling, walking back to breakfast, hungry and aching and full of energy. This first experiment had gone so well, in fact, that Remus decided he would say yes to anything his friends asked of him from now on. In this way, he would keep himself busy until Sirius went back to being whatever he'd been before.

At breakfast they were greeted by a row of red eyed, sickly-faced Gryffindors, all leaning sleepily on their elbows, Mary and Marlene sitting back to back, propping each other up.

“Christ,” Mary squinted at James and Remus, “You’ve not been *exercising*?! Bloody lunatics.”

“*You* went, Moony?!” Sirius looked up, wincing and rubbing his apparently sore neck.

Remus just gave him a small shrug, then looked away. Sirius didn’t try to talk to him again.

They were halfway through the meal - Remus as usual eating half his bodyweight in fried bread, eggs, baked beans and bacon; everyone else picking at their own plate with faintly nauseous expressions or else nursing a large mug of black coffee - when Lily straightened up, eyes wide suddenly, as if electrified.

“Oh shit!” she said, then kicked James under the table, “Potter!” She hissed, “We never gave Remus his present!”

James smirked at her, and Remus raised an eyebrow,

“You and James got me a present? Together?”

“We all did,” James laughed, “And there’s no need to beat me up, Evans, I’ve got it right here,” he withdrew a brown leather box from his robes. It was about the size of his hand, smooth and expensive looking, with a gold embossed border. It looked like the sort of thing girls kept their pricier jewellery in.

“You all...?” Remus accepted the box, curiously. “I hope you didn’t spend too much, you know I can’t--”

“Oh, shut yer face, Moony,” Peter yawned, prodding his porridge dazedly, “We had a whip-round for you - almost everyone in Gryffindor wanted to put in.”

“Not just Gryffindor, either,” Marlene grinned, “Nearly everyone we asked, even some teachers!”

Remus was just looking down at the box, now, because he knew he had probably gone red. Some hot, sickly bubble of emotion was burning his throat, so he swallowed, hard, which didn’t help.

“Open it, Remus!” He heard Lily’s voice. He pried it apart, and the box sprang open in a pleasingly neat motion. The interior was midnight blue velvet, and nestled among the folds was the most beautiful piece of treasure Remus had ever seen.

It was a golden pocket watch, on a long, fine chain, polished to a high shine so that it was practically glowing. The case was decorated with intricate, vine-like swirls and patterns surrounding a shield at the centre which had been engraved in elaborate script with his initials: *R. J. L.*

He snapped it open with the lightest touch, and saw inside that the clock face was mother of pearl, and shimmered gorgeously beneath the golden hands which ticked away reassuringly. The other half seemed to contain a compass.

“I didn’t think they worked at Hogwarts?” He murmured,

“It’s special!” Mary said, eagerly, “It doesn’t point north, or wherever normal ones do. If you say the name of somebody you love, it points you in their direction!”

“Try it out, Moony!” James encouraged.

Remus looked up at his friends, nervously, then quickly raised the watch to his mouth and whispered,

“Lily Evans.”

At once, the needle spun into place, pointing directly across the table. Lily grinned bashfully. James kicked him under the table,

“Bloody ladies man.”

“You’re all amazing.” Remus said, hoping he didn’t sound too choked up. “Bloody amazing.”

For the first week, Remus’s new regime seemed pretty effective. It certainly kept him busy. He said yes to everything; happily dropping whatever he was doing at a minute’s notice to help a younger student with their homework, or call a group study session when the Care of Magical Creatures NEWTs class panicked over sphinxes. He accompanied Lily on patrols, he discussed literature with Chris, talked quidditch tactics with Marlene and played endless games of chess with Peter (and lost every time). He was the angel of Gryffindor tower.

Because Sirius was not the only thing Remus was ignoring.

The old shoebox Dumbledore had given him sat underneath his bed still, gathering dust and unopened, as it probably had been for many years – perhaps on some shelf in Matron’s office. *Why was it a shoebox?* Remus wondered, as he tossed and turned in his bed every night. Something so mundane, so every day. It made whatever was inside seem all the more terrifying. Trust Matron to be so heartlessly practical. It wasn’t even from a good shoe shop, like Clarks or Johnson’s. It was an economy brand, like everything else he’d ever received at St Edmund’s.

The box might have contained any number of things; and it wasn’t that Remus wasn’t curious. It wasn’t as if he didn’t *try* to imagine what was in there. Deeds to a house he could go and live in, that would be pretty brilliant. Maybe some old money. Photographs. A letter from his father, an explanation - it might contain answers to questions he hadn’t even known to ask.

But he didn’t open it. He knew that once he opened the box, all of the mystery would disappear, and he would be left with something disappointing. Because there could be nothing inside that could *truly* satisfy him.

So, keeping busy helped; making sure he exhausted himself each day so that he fell straight to sleep each night, even when the other boys stayed up chatting, plotting pranks. But Sirius himself helped, too. By some incredible twist of fate, he appeared to be giving Remus space.

If Sirius remembered Remus’s harsh words from the night of the party, then he didn’t mention it. But he didn’t try to get him alone, or treat him with any kind of resentment or disdain. Remus surmised that Sirius had either:

1. been too drunk to take anything in, or;
2. taken Remus at his word, and chosen to back away quietly.

For Remus, with exams on the horizon, option 2 was by far the most preferable, so he decided to believe it.

Their separation was so smooth, and so complete, that soon even Remus had a hard time believing they’d ever been close at all. Surely, to everyone else, it must seem that nothing had changed at all.

Sirius was still Sirius - outgoing, girl-loving, cheeky, rebellious, devastating. And Remus was just Remus - quiet, private, studious and long-suffering secondary marauder.

As March drew to a close, the birthday party now weeks behind them, there was only one moment when the situation very nearly came to a head, but was quickly deflated, with help from an unexpected quarter.

It was late one Friday afternoon, and Remus was hosting an introductory duelling workshop. Christopher was there – Christopher was never far away, these days – but most of the class were beginners, and much younger. They were just grasping some basic disarming and diversionary spells, when the door to the Charms classroom opened, but no one walked in. Everyone turned to look, and muttered ‘Peeves’, before returning to their attack stances. Remus knew better.

He followed the scent about the room, and watched the open door of Flitwick’s office moved only very slightly, as if someone had brushed the handle on their way inside. Flitwick trusted Remus, and left his office open in case they needed any equipment from inside - he kept a number of large mattresses which were good for duelling, as well as an emergency healing kit in there. Remus cleared his throat,

“That’s good! Keep practicing, remember to enunciate nice and loudly, for me... I’ll be right back.”

He slipped around the edges of the room as he said this, then stepped inside the office.

“Sirius,” Remus hissed, “Get out, this isn’t--”

“I’m just hiding from Filch! Have a heart, Moony!” Sirius whipped back the invisibility cloak, a familiar grin on his face. The sort of grin that usually got him whatever he liked. Remus bristled.

“You’ve got the cloak, hide somewhere else! I’m nearly finished in here, anyway, they’ll be leaving in a minute.”

“Well then it’s no big deal, is it? I’ll just stay ‘til they’re all gone. Might even learn something!”

“Remus? Are you ok in there?” A tap at the door. Christopher.

“Yeah, sorry!” Remus gave Sirius one last furious glance, before stepping out. Sirius grinned and vanished again. Remus left the door open, and he knew that Sirius had got bored and left the office. Remus pictured him leaning casually against the wall, observing with a wry smile.

Remus carried on teaching as best he could, trying to ignore the distraction. He felt horribly exposed, being watched like that, knowing that Sirius was so near. When the class finally finished, Remus ushered them all out, saying that the room was needed for something else. Everyone left, chattering excitedly about the weekend ahead. Everyone except Christopher.

“I’ll help you clear up,” he said, eagerly, as the last few students filtered out, shouting their goodbyes to Remus as they went.

Christopher and Remus made short work of rearranging the Charms classroom, restoring it to its usual orderliness. He could feel Sirius watching them the whole time, the hairs on the back of his neck standing up.

“Did you read that book?” Christopher asked, “*The Charioteer*?”

Remus winced, but nodded,

“Yeah, it was good.”

It had been good. Hard to read, at points, worryingly relatable. But something of a relief, too.

“Oh, I’m so glad you liked it!” Christopher said. Remus could imagine Sirius pulling a face at Chris getting so excited over a *book*. “What about the ending?”

“Oh, yeah, it was good. I liked it.”

“Really?” Christopher wrinkled his nose, “I didn’t. I wish Laurie had picked Andrew, don’t you?”

Of course Christopher identified with Andrew - sweet and bookish and chaste.

“I liked Ralph.” Remus shrugged, “Even if he wasn’t perfect, he was more... I dunno. Exciting?”

Remus had thought Ralph sounded really fucking sexy, actually - but he had been picturing Sirius the whole time, which might have had a lot to do with it. He dearly hoped that if Sirius was eavesdropping - and of course he was, he was Sirius, after all - that he didn’t understand a word Christopher was saying.

“I thought you’d like him best,” Christopher said, with a note of sadness. He was standing next to Remus now, his satchel over one shoulder, ready to go. *Just go*, Remus begged, inwardly. “He reminded me a bit of your friend, Sirius Black.”

“Oh?!” That got his attention. And Sirius’s too, Remus could practically feel him straighten up.

“Yeah,” Christopher smiled coyly, “Sorry, but it’s pretty obvious you have a bit of a thing for him.”

Remus just blinked, struck dumb. Christopher laughed softly, “It’s a waste of time, Remus, can’t you see that? Yeah, he’s... beautiful, and everything, but he’s clearly girl-mad. You ought to... I mean, you *deserve* someone who cares about you as much as you care about them.”

“Christopher, I don-”

Christopher cut him off with a kiss - he just reached up and *kissed* Remus, as if it was that easy. Remus’s first instinct was to push him away; this was nothing *like* what he’d wanted. Fortunately, it was only the briefest brush of the lips.

“Oh, Chris...” Remus breathed, “I... you’re such a good mate, and...”

Oh shit. He shouldn’t have said ‘mate’. *Mate* was the worst possible word. He could practically see Christopher’s heart break. But only for a moment, before that pureblood, stiff-upper-lip took over. He shook his head, stepped back.

“It’s fine. Honestly. I’d rather be friends than not, if that’s all we can be.”

Remus ached.

“C’mon,” Christopher smiled, as if nothing had happened. “It’s steak and kidney pie tonight, your favourite.”

They left the classroom - just the two of them - and Remus quietly closed the door behind him, to avoid suspicion.

Sixth Year: Apparitions

Sirius didn't show up for dinner. Emmeline wandered over and asked James where he was, but James just shrugged,

"Sorry," he said, "We were on a mission earlier, but I lost track of him. Hope Filch never caught him..."

"And why would Filch be looking for Sirius?" Lily asked, setting down her knife and for and giving James a very direct look.

"Er... I'm sure I don't know." James said quickly, staring at his mashed potato as if it was the most fascinating thing in the world. Twenty minutes later, the prefects were summoned to an emergency meeting to discuss a problem on the fifth floor - all of the suits of armour had apparently begun singing opera.

All of the students were ordered to their common rooms for the rest of the evening, and when Peter, Remus, Marlene and Mary reached the tower, they found Sirius there, sitting in front of the fireplace, smoking. *Where did he get the fags?* Remus wondered. *He usually asks me.* Sirius Black was not the type to buy his own cigarettes; he was a professional borrower.

"Alright, Black?" Mary asked, cheerfully.

"Yeah fine." Sirius grunted, still staring at the fire.

"Weren't hungry?" She asked.

"Nope." He inhaled and puffed out, like a restless dragon.

"Ah," Mary raised knowing eyebrow, and looked at the others, "In one of your moods, I see."

He did not respond to this. Remus often forgot how well Mary knew Sirius. He admired the breezy, no-nonsense way she dealt with him; his own instinct was often to coddle and give in. He ought to take a leaf out of Mary's book, he thought.

When Christopher returned from the prefect's meeting, Remus stuck to him like glue for as long as possible. Partly because he knew he had hurt him, and he wanted to show him that nothing had changed. Partly because he knew that Sirius wouldn't come anywhere near them while they were together. They sat on the window seat at the back of the room, furthest from the fireplace. It was the same place Sirius had sat with Remus only a few months ago, where they'd argued, then made up. But he wasn't thinking about it. He was listening to Christopher's rundown of the prefect's briefing,

"...and everybody *knows* Potter probably had something to do with it, but obviously there's no proof because he's basically a professional vandal, and everyone loves him, so he gets away with it. Even Lily Evans has given up, she never takes him to task like she used to."

"Oh, really?" Remus feigned interest, watching the back of Sirius's armchair.

"Yeah," Christopher nodded, "She's gone soft on him. I even asked her what she thought should be done to punish the pranksters, and she actually giggled! She said it was actually quite funny, and as it hadn't hurt anyone that I should lighten up! I used to really look up to her, you know."

"Maybe you should lighten up," Remus sighed, "It does sound like it was funny. God knows we could all do with a laugh."

"Prefects are supposed to uphold *all* of the rules," Christopher replied, an echo of McGonagall in his voice, "Not just the boring ones. Anyway, if that's how you feel, I don't know why I bother."

He started to get up,

"Chris," Remus looked up at him, "C'mon, don't be like that. I'll quiz you on Runes if you like."

"I don't feel like it." Christopher replied, snippily, "I'm going to bed." He walked off, towards the dorms. Remus sighed again, and rubbed his eyes. He'd give it a few minutes then go up himself. It had been a trying sort of day.

But of course, it wasn't over. No sooner had Remus brushed his teeth and changed into his pyjamas, than Sirius had taken his opportunity. He was standing in the middle of the dorm room with a face like thunder, arms folded. Remus felt at a bit of a disadvantage, in his night things and bare feet, but he tried to remain stoic and nodded.

"Hello, Sirius. I'm just going to bed." He tried to walk towards his side of the room, but Sirius blocked him.

"You really pissed me off, you know that?" He said, furiously.

"Excuse me?" Remus reeled back, frowning. Sirius carried on, practically ranting.

"If you were trying to make me jealous, then I think it's really bloody low of you, Remus."

Remus rolled his eyes, which he knew would rile Sirius up even more.

"Oh, *of course* ." He said, sarcastically, "Everything's about *you* , isn't it? For god's sake, you weren't even supposed to be there! Why didn't you just leave with the rest of the group?!"

"I thought you'd want to go down to dinner together! How was I supposed to know you've been having secret trysts with that... that..."

"I haven't been having 'secret trysts' with anyone but *you* , you idiot." Remus spat, "And you've already made me regret that. Christopher is my friend, and either way it's none of your bloody business, so keep your nose out!"

"Fine!" Sirius shouted, "If that's what you want!"

"I said so, didn't I?!"

Remus was furious, so angry that he knew if he stayed much longer he'd say something he regretted. They both liked the last word in an argument, it was one of the only ways they were similar. As he had nowhere to go, he pushed past Sirius to his bed, and shut the curtains so vigorously that he almost ripped the rings from the frame.

In a few moments, he heard Sirius's angry footsteps stomping back down the stairs. *Well*, Remus thought. *If he didn't get the message before, he's got it now.*

* * *

Monday 4th April 1977

Inconveniently enough, the very first Apparition lesson of the year happened to fall on the April full moon. Remus was already intensely nervous - in that shaky, sweaty sort of way - about these lessons; add to that the challenge he usually had keeping his magic under control in the days preceding the moon, and he was sure it was a recipe for disaster.

"I might end up on the other side of the country!" He said in a low voice to Lily as they queued up outside the Great Hall.

"You can't," she assured him. "I asked Professor McGonagall; they've only lifted the anti-apparition measures on the hall, so I don't think you can get outside it."

"Really? Ok, that's good." He nodded, trying to calm himself. It had been unendingly useful, having Lily aware of the furry little problem. She was much better at common sense than James or Sirius.

"Anyway," she whispered, "You should stop acting like it's a bad thing, being extra strong sometimes. I'd have thought it was an advantage, especially for someone as clever as you."

That struck him in a funny way. No one had ever suggested he try to be positive about his problem before. Well, except for Livia. *You don't know half of the power you hold, Remus Lupin.*

Inside the hall, Professor McGonagall introduced the eager sixth and seventh years to the tall, spindly ministry official who was there to teach them apparition. Remus had, of course, done a fair bit of reading on the subject, and already knew about the 'three d's', but he had rather hoped there would be more to it than that.

After much too little instruction, in Remus's opinion, the students were given wooden hoops, asked to simply 'have a go'. He caught Mary's eye, as they carried their hoops to a free space. She pulled a bug-eyed face and he laughed, which earned a stern look from the instructor. Not wanting to make a bad impression, Remus re-focussed his attention on the hoop.

It was very difficult to concentrate, when everyone around you was twirling on the spot, tripping and stumbling, like puppies being trained to roll over. Still, Remus closed his eyes and tried.

Deliberation. Best not to take it too fast; like flying a broom. Slow and steady wins the race.

Determination. He really, really wanted to beat Sirius.

Destination. The hoop wasn't even that far away. He'd side-alonged further, that time with Mr Potter.

Remus tried to recall how that had felt. The magic, pulling him forward - no, more like... more like following a channel, like water swirling down a bathtub drain; if you pressed your fingertips against the holes you could feel the vacuum sucking... it was a bit like that.

"BOLLOCKS!" A shout went up, causing a lapse in Remus's concentration. He opened his eyes in time to see James and Sirius sitting dazed on floor, staring at each other confused, rubbing their heads. *Oh no*, Remus thought, *did they do it, already?*

"Idiots." Mary laughed. Everyone else was laughing too, and Sirius was looking extremely put out, as he climbed to his feet and dusted off his robes with a dignified sniff.

"What happened?" Remus asked.

"They both jumped at the same time and hit each other." She snorted. "Silly buggers. I'm not

feeling anything, are you?"

Remus shook his head. He closed his eyes again and concentrated as hard as he could, feeling for whatever it was that would pull him in the right way. He thought he had it, tried twirling, but got nowhere. At least he didn't fall over.

Something wasn't right. This was like the stupid patronus thing all over again (he still hadn't managed one; he was one of the only ones who hadn't. Even *Peter* had produced a wispy bit of silver.) Only the trick to that was having a happy thought - and Remus accepted that happy thoughts were not his forte. *This*, however, *this* required determination. And wasn't he determined?

Just then, the ministry sanctioned apparition instructor wafted past, and Remus caught a whiff of his magic. It was peculiar and strong - buzzing. It reminded him of the way that the old TV in the rec room at St Edmund's gathered a fuzz of static on the screen. As a child, Remus had held his hands up to it in wonder, and stroked the bizarre, otherworldly energy, as if he could absorb it

There was a snap in Remus's mind, like ice cracking. That was it! Remus relaxed his body. He didn't have to *look* for the right channel, or try to feel it out - he could *already* feel it. The room was full of magic, thick and iron-like and hot-cold against his teeth. He could always sense it, he just learnt to tune it out over the years. That was harder to do on a full moon, but in this scenario, that might not be a disadvantage, as Lily had said...

He closed his eyes, breathed in, and moved - it felt like only the slightest twitch, a wand flick, or the quirk of an eyebrow. He let the magic do all the work, and when he opened his eyes with a gasp, he was inside the hoop.

"Bravo!" The instructor was clapping his spindly hands together delicately, noiselessly.

"Nice one, Moony!" James called across the room, a large, egg shaped bruise growing on his forehead.

"Well *done*, Remus!" The girls cheered.

Remus looked at his feet, embarrassed, but thrilled.

* * *

Friday 15th April 1977

By mid-April, there seemed to be no limits to Remus's newfound confidence. He was cautious about it, of course - he didn't tell anybody (perish the thought!) in case they might think him arrogant, or even worse - dangerous. But he knew that something had changed. For many years now, Remus had considered his lycanthropy, and the uncontrollable feelings and senses which arose from it, as a limitation on his magic. If the past few weeks were anything to go by - this had been incorrect.

Perhaps this misunderstanding was simply due to the fact that too little study had been done on werewolves in the wizarding world. Or perhaps Livia had been right - Remus had been instructed by the wrong people all along.

Now, in private, he carried out various experiments, from simple, basic spells, to much more complex transfiguration and transmutation. All of them came much easier when he relaxed, when he harnessed whatever magic was already there in the space around him. Before, casting a spell had felt like drawing water up from a well inside him, a heavy bucket on a winch. After the apparition

discovery, he felt as though he had been standing in a lake all along - and all he needed to do was drink. He had even begun to make steps towards wordless magic.

In the meantime, he had exams to prepare for, and while his newfound strength would certainly be useful in his practical exams, Remus still had to complete several written papers. On this particular afternoon, he had convinced James (and by extension, Peter) to revise along with him. It was a bright spring day, and the last chills of winter had eked out enough that they all agreed with would be nice to sit outside for a change.

They sprawled on the grass, books open, James reading with his tongue between his teeth and a quill behind his ear, Peter half-heartedly jotting down notes on hinkypunks.

"It's not fair," he whinged, "It's not NEWTs or OWLs this year, why've we got to do exams at all?"

"Wouldn't want you to lose your edge, Wormy," James replied, still engrossed in his book. "Think of it as practice for NEWTs."

"Rather not." Peter pulled a face. "Moony, do you have the notes for--"

"Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays." Remus said, promptly, not looking up from his DADA essay.

"What?" Peter scratched his head.

"Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays." Remus repeated. "Those are the days I hold my study groups, and *those* are the days I help other people with their work. I need the rest of the time to catch up with my own stuff."

"Oh, but I'm your *best friend*," Peter moaned, "Pleeease, Moony?"

"Less time snogging Dorcas, more time organising your notes." Remus smirked. It was very easy to be pious when you weren't allowed to snog the people you wanted to snog. Speaking of which.

"All right, lads?" Sirius came sauntering across the lawn towards them, Emmeline trotting along behind him. James looked up and grinned, Peter moved to make a space.

"Where've you been?" James asked, "Never see you these days."

"Not my fault you've become *one of them*, prefect Potter." Sirius replied, coolly, "I had detention."

"You're in detention more often than I'm doing anything prefect-ish," James countered, no longer reading his book, now back in marauder mode. He nodded at Emmeline, who sat primly beside Sirius, smoothing her skirt down, "All right, Em?"

"Hi James," she smiled back at him, "Peter, Remus. Are you all revising?"

"Unfortunately," Peter groaned. "Moony's not helping me, though."

"Oh, help yourself, for once," Remus snapped, no longer lightly teasing.

"I think it's a good idea," Emmeline said, encouragingly, "Get it out of the way before Hogsmeade this weekend. I think it's responsible, don't you, Sirius?"

"S'pose."

"Speaking of," she continued, ignoring his brush off, "What do you fancy doing in Hogsmeade?"

Will I meet you there, or will you pick me up outside my common room?"

"Ugh, I dunno. Why's it have to be a big deal?"

Peter, despite his earlier despair, suddenly became fascinated by his DADA notes, head bowed over the parchment.

"Other boys don't mind making plans to take their girlfriends out," Emmeline said, her voice edging on shrill. This was clearly old ground for them.

Like Peter, James and Remus began to concentrate on their books and notes as if their lives depended on it. Sirius and Emmeline carried on bickering regardless.

"I'm not other boys," Sirius growled, "I thought you liked that."

"So did I." She shot back.

"So, what? I'm a terrible boyfriend because I don't want to trail around after you like some soppy git?"

"That's not what I'm asking and you know it!"

"Stop complaining then."

"I'm not compl--"

"Sounds like it. Moan moan moan."

Emmeline opened and closed her mouth a few times, clearly wanting to say something back, but not wanting it to sound like moaning. Finally, she sat in silence, staring at the ground. Her eyes looked a bit brighter than usual, and Remus finally felt himself softening towards her. Poor girl.

"Oh *Merlin*, don't sulk." Sirius complained at her silence. "If you're angry then let's have a fight, if you're ok then give us a snog – but *please* don't sulk."

"Ugh, and those are the only two options with you, aren't they, Sirius?!" Emmeline snapped, climbing to her feet and folding her arms across her chest.

"Yep." He replied, grinning that Sirius Black grin.

"Oh!" She threw her hands up and stormed away, back towards the castle.

Once she was gone, there was only the uncomfortable silence left. James cleared his throat.

"Not very nice, Pads." He said over his textbook. "She's upset now."

"She's always upset," Sirius whined, "What about *my* feelings?"

"I'm not convinced you have any." James said, without missing a beat. "What do you think, Moony?"

Remus glanced up from his own book, hoping he looked harassed and uninterested – as if he hadn't been paying rapt attention.

"Hm?"

“Does Padfoot have feelings?”

Sirius caught his eye. Remus straightened his back, looked away.

“Definitely not.”

Sirius stood up without a word, and left.

“Sirius? Oi!” James stood, but Sirius did not look back. James scratched his head, sitting back down uneasily. He was thoughtful for a moment before looking at Remus. “Moony... is something going on between you two?”

Remus glared at him.

“Ask him!”

“I did. He won’t say anything.”

“...really?” Remus was genuinely surprised. He’d been half certain Sirius had told him every filthy detail. He must really be ashamed.

“Really.” James was looking at him very intensely now, “What’s going on?”

“I... I slept with Mary.” At least it was true. Peter made an odd sort gasp, beside him, but Remus ignored it. “He found out, that’s all.”

“You... what?!” James eyebrows shot up in unmasked surprise. He quickly rearranged his features, clearing his throat, “Oh, well good on you, mate. I had no idea you and she...”

“Just a one off thing.” Remus said, quickly.

“Ok. Right, well. Why’s Sirius in a mood about it? He and Mary broke up ages ago.”

“Yeah.” Remus replied, glumly. He sighed, “Oh, go on then, Pete, borrow my notes. Which bit are you stuck on?”

Sixth Year: The Box

Chapter Summary

I will dedicate the chapter to one of my most prolific reviewers, AccioMeatballs, who just wants to know 'What's in the fucking box??' :P

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The quidditch stands on a Sunday were one of the only places you were guaranteed some peace and quiet at Hogwarts. Remus had been going there every week since his birthday to catch the tail end of James's spartan training sessions, and to have a flying lesson of his own, afterwards.

This morning, however, as he limped into the stands, he found that he was not alone.

"Hiya, Lily," Remus beamed, surprised, "What are you doing here?"

Lily spun around and blinked at him, mouth open in a small pink 'O', as if she had not expected anyone else. Her eyes darted to the pitch, then back to Remus nervously, and she gave a sheepish grin,

"Hi! Er... just watching Marls practice. Moral support and all that."

"Oh, right. Mind if I join you?"

She smiled and shifted her bag, as if to make room for him, though the stands were completely empty. They sat quietly and watched the practice for a bit. James was drilling the chasers and the keeper, so only half the team was there today. Remus vaguely remembered James's 'focus sessions' initiative, which had come as a relief to the rest of the Gryffindor team, as it meant they didn't *actually* have to practice every day, even if James did.

"Er... Lily?" Remus said, after a while, "Did you know that Marlene isn't practicing today?"

She looked down at her knees, her hair falling in a coppery sheet in front of her face.

"Yes." She whispered.

"So you're here to watch...?"

"Don't make me *say it*, Remus," she sounded defeated. She raised her head, pushing her hair behind her ear, "Go on then, let me have it."

"What?!" Remus was amused. Prefect Lily Evans, all come undone. Sirius would love it.

"Tease me, make fun of me, tell me I'm a complete idiot..." she sighed, looking out at the pitch, "I already know."

"I don't think you're an idiot just for fancying James." Remus laughed, nudging her jovially, "But... I mean, it is a *bit* funny, after all this time."

“Ugh, I know.” She groaned, “I can’t bloody believe it.”

“Does he know?”

“No!” She stared at him in disbelief, “I’d absolutely *die* !”

“Why?!” Remus laughed again, “You don’t honestly think he’ll turn you down? He’s been hoping for this *exact thing* for five years!”

“Exactly!” She said, gesturing wildly with her hands, spreading out her fingers in a show of exasperation. “He’s wanted it forever, and I’ve only wanted it for... er... well maybe a little while, actually... but nowhere near as long. If I give in now, he’s so *intense* . I might break his heart.”

She bit her lip, still watching him flying, blowing his whistle and pointing emphatically at the goal rings.

“You might.” Remus agreed, “But I think James Potter would consider it an honour to have his heart broken by you.”

She snorted,

“Remus, honestly, you sound as bad as he does. I’m not this... I dunno, perfect ‘dream girl’ who’s going breeze into his life and make all the crap stuff wonderful. It’s not a fairytale. *I’m* not a fairytale. I’m really annoying. I’m a complete mess in the mornings - ask Mary - and I hate losing arguments, and I shout when I’m angry, and my nose runs when I cry. I don’t know anything about quidditch and I don’t *really* want to learn, either.”

“So?” Remus smiled. “I’m pretty sure he knows most of that. If he doesn’t then I don’t think it’ll hurt for him to find out. Anyway, it’s not as if James is perfect. I’ve smelled his socks.”

Lily laughed.

“Thanks, Remus.”

“Going to tell him?”

She wrinkled her freckled nose.

“Nah. Want to think about it a bit more first.”

“Just going to stare at him riding his broom for hours on end?”

She shoved him, laughing,

“If I want to! He’s easy on the eye, what can I say?” She poked out her tongue and returned to gawping. Remus smiled, and dredged up the only real piece of advice he had.

“Don’t leave it too long. It gets harder, the longer you wait.”

Lily looked at him, curiously, and Remus instantly regretted saying anything.

“Oh yeah?” She said, “You seem very wise in the ways of love, all of a sudden.”

“Nah.” He laughed, he hoped convincingly, “I just read lots.”

* * *

"I could have given you all of my heart,

But there's someone who's torn it apart.

And he's taken nearly all that I have got,

But if you want I'll try to love again..."

"Black, next time you decide to break someone's heart, can you do it *outside* of the exam period?"

Lily groaned as Sirius entered the common room and every radio, turntable and gramophone within twenty metres began blaring PP Arnold's tragedy stricken voice.

"Baby I'll try to love again, but I know..."

The first cut is the deepest..."

"What d'you want me to do about it?!" Sirius raged, storming about the room, trying to mute every speaker in sight.

It had been a painful, drawn out melodrama, but Emmeline and Sirius had finally split. And apparently *nobody* treated Emmeline Vance like that, so in retaliation, she had placed a very advanced hex on him, which meant that every time he entered a room breakup songs began to play. This was usually limited to music players, but occasionally, when there was nothing else about, the portraits had begun to burst into song too.

"Just apologise to her and get the bloody spell lifted!" Lily replied.

"Cuz when it comes to being lucky, he's cursed,

when it comes to lovin' me, he's worst..."

"I've got nothing to apologise for!" He spat back, forcefully, "*Silencio ! Silencio silencio , SILENCIO !*"

The music finally stopped. Who knew for how long. Remus didn't get involved, he could only make it worse, and Sirius had been in a foul mood all week.

"Got to give it to the girl," Mary mused. "She's creative." She was straddling Marlene, who lay on her front on the rug, Mary plaiting her long blonde hair. Every time she got to the end, she would unravel it all, comb it out gently, and begin again. Sometimes Remus didn't think he'd ever understand girls. Still, Marlene, who usually hated being fussed over, seemed to be quite enjoying it, she looked very peaceful.

"Oh yeah, go on, take her side, you lot. Bloody women." Sirius threw himself into the armchair opposite Lily and slouched into it, glaring at the fire. "Anyone got a fag?"

Remus did, but he didn't say anything.

"Not surprised she dumped you," Mary grinned, "You're a miserable git these days. I'm well shot of you." She gave him a joking wink, and his frown diminished.

"You love me really," he muttered.

"Let's talk about something else." Marlene said, from the floor. "Not exams or bloody relationships. Potter, what's going on with this camping trip?"

“All sorted - you lot just need to show up,” James grinned, “With your tents, obviously.”

“Dad says I can borrow the family ones, as long as I take care of them,” Lily said, “Two two-sleepers.”

“Cosy.” Sirius said, sarcastically, “With seven of us going.”

“Eight,” Peter piped up, “James said I could bring Dorcas.”

Remus groaned inwardly at that. Not that he didn’t like Dorcas; Dorcas was fine. But he had been looking forward to a summer holiday with all of his closest friends, not tag-alongs. Thank goodness Mary wasn’t bringing her latest boyfriend. Though, with Mary, the turnover was too fast to make any kind of long term plans.

“Well I was rather hoping that you boys would bring your own tent, actually.” Lily replied, giving Sirius a frosty look.

“Mum said in her last letter that there’s a muggle camping supply shop in our village,” James said, quickly, ever the peacemaker, “So we’ll all go and get ours as soon as we’re home. You’re definitely coming to stay, this summer, right Moony?”

“If it’s still ok?” Remus asked, anxiously. He still didn’t have a plan b. Maybe James would let him keep one of the tents afterwards. Ugh, what a depressing thought.

“Of course,” James grinned magnanimously, rubbing his hands together, “This summer is going to be *great* .”

“How are we getting to Cornwall?” Marlene asked. “Apparating?”

“If we’ve all passed, yeah.”

They looked at Peter, guiltily. He’d still not quite managed to get anywhere without splinching himself, yet.

“I’m really trying,” he said, embarrassed. “I could get the Knight Bus?”

“It’ll be fine,” James said, cheerily. “I promise. Best summer ever.”

* * *

Mother

You had me

But I never had you

I wanted you

You didn’t want me.

Friday 24th June 1977

And really, Remus thought to himself, as he left his last exam of the term - Care of Magical Creatures, written - thank goodness for James’s eternal optimism. It was one of the only things that

kept any of them going, these days.

Exams were the same as they ever had been - easier, maybe, at least when it came to practical magic. Fortunately no one expected a patronus this year. There was something reassuring about a timetable, though, and deadlines and timed exercises. It all made good common sense, and didn't encourage too much independent thought. Remus was always grateful for an opportunity to switch off his brain. Especially as he had set himself a very personal deadline of his own.

Once his final exam was over (and today was the day), he would open the shoebox. It had been sitting under his bed for the better part of three months now. He had not so much as glanced at it. Whatever was in it would be disruptive, he knew that. Even if it was nothing more than some boring notes from Matron, old school work or something, he knew that just thinking about the whole St Edmund's problem was going to drag him down eventually. He told himself that it was very sensible and mature; he needed a clear head for exams.

But it was late June now, and he had nothing left to do. Of course, there was always *something* to do - NEWTs would begin in earnest next year; he ought to get a head start. There was talk about an end of year party, and he could start preparing for that. He really ought to catch up on his reading for Madam Pomfrey's healing classes, too; he was woefully behind on bruises.

He ate lunch first. Unpleasant experiences were generally better faced on a full stomach. There were exams scheduled that afternoon for Muggle Studies and Divination - both of which James and Sirius were taking.

"Moony, what are hot air balloons for? I still don't get it..." James pleaded, looking very frazzled.

"You'll be fine," Lily said, pouring herself some pumpkin juice, "Muggle Studies should be easy for you, after advanced Transfiguration."

"Wow, thanks Evans," James beamed. Everyone looked at Lily, who blushed and returned to her food.

"I've still never seen anything in a crystal ball." Peter sighed deeply.

"Tell her you see a grim," Sirius said, cheerfully, "That's what I'm doing."

"Why a grim?"

"I just have a feeling she might actually see one, tomorrow afternoon, at about two o'clock." Sirius smirked. James and Peter began to laugh, much to the girls' confusion.

Remus loitered outside the Great Hall for as long as he could with his friends, until they all had to go in for the exam. *Putting it off a few minutes won't hurt...*

But eventually, it was time to face the music. After all, the sooner he did it, the longer he'd have by himself to actually process it. Even if it was nothing; even if he only had to cope with another disappointment. He had a good book on hand, and full access to Sirius's record collection, so the afternoon didn't have to be completely unpleasant.

He drew the curtains around his bed, even though he was alone in the dorm room. He blew the dust from the cardboard lid, and it made him cough.

"*Scourgify*," he choked, aiming his wand at his sheets to rid them of the nasty grey matter. No going back now. As quickly as ripping off a plaster, he lifted the lid.

At first, it all looked completely harmless. Everything inside was flat - papers, presumably, sorted into neat brown envelopes of varying sizes, varying ages.

His admission papers to St Edmund's - *Remus John Lupin, 5 years 3 months, arrival date 12/07/1965. Reports written by his primary school teachers - all of the marks were 'poor'. 'Shows very little aptitude for academia', one read, 'Incapable of learning. May suit unskilled work.'* Fucking bitches.

His birth certificate. It was a muggle one - he supposed his mother had not been admitted to St. Mungo's. Remus learnt that he had been born at home, in Bristol, of all places. His mother's name was Hope, and his father was listed as 'Unemployed'. All of this, Remus worked through with impassive patience, like an archivist sifting through documents relating to some ancient history, not his own life. But then came the photographs.

They were black and white. Muggle; unmoving. One of a chubby baby dressed in some white knitted affair, with buttons shaped like bunny rabbits. Remus supposed it was him, there was nothing written on the back, only the stamp from Boots. There was another, which must have been taken when he arrived at St Edmund's. In it, he was able to recognise some features - the dark, cautious stare, the mouth set in a determined grimace. He was looking up - at whoever was taking the photo, presumably - and he looked frightened.

The last picture was the worst. It was of a family he did not remember.

There was Lyall, tall and slim and gangly, tousled hair and small, wire framed spectacles. He was smiling - Remus never pictured him smiling. Sitting in a floral armchair beside him was a small, very young looking woman. She had immaculate platinum blonde hair in a proper sixties beehive, and she was wearing a neat shirtwaister which showed off her pretty figure. Her nose was a bit long and beakish, but she had a nice face. On her lap was a little boy, giggling, his face all creased up with joy. She was looking at him, her mouth was open - what had she been saying?

Remus put it down, feeling light headed. He realised he'd been holding his breath for a long time, and exhaled. There was one envelope left. The handwriting on it was not Matron's. It hadn't been sealed, though, so maybe she'd read it before. Maybe that's why she hadn't given it to him. Steeling himself once more, Remus pulled out a letter, folded neatly in thirds. It was written on pretty note paper with a floral design at the borders. The handwriting was pretty, too.

My darling boy,

I know I've no right to leave you this letter. It may be a good few years before you receive it - if you receive it at all. I hope that you do, and I hope that when you do, you'll be old enough. Still, I don't expect forgiveness.

I can't think what to tell you. How can I explain? You were my beautiful, precious boy from the moment you were born. No - from the moment I felt you move inside me. Your father and I loved each other very much, and having you tripled our happiness a thousand times over. You were loved, my little Remus, I pray you haven't forgotten it. But you're very young, and they tell me that sometimes forgetting is kindest.

When the accident happened, I promised you I would do everything I could to make it right again. I had some stupid idea that just loving you would be enough.

Then when Lyall left us both, I tried for you. I swear tried. But I was never a very clever girl, and never as strong or practical as your father. You needed so much, and I had so little. I had no family once I married him, you see, they told me to make a choice. My parents didn't approve, and even

after he'd gone, I knew they wouldn't approve of you.

I can't say how sorry I am, to let you go. In my heart I know it's the safest thing, and the best for you, in the end. I know I will never forget you, and I know I will always long to see you again. I pray that when the time comes, I shall not be difficult for you to find.

All my love,

Hope Jenkins.

Remus put the letter back in the envelope and closed the box. He threw the box under the bed. He climbed underneath his heavy covers and curled up small, like he used to at St Edmund's. He felt as if a hole had been opened up inside of him, a big, gaping emptiness. Tears picked his eyes, and because he was alone, he let them come.

* * *

Saturday 2nd July 1977

He'd never given his mother much thought. At least, not since he'd been at Hogwarts, which seemed so full of Lyall and all his achievements and mistakes. Obviously it would have been better to have a mother than not, but he wasn't sure what he'd been missing all that time. Matron hadn't been very maternal, but she wasn't paid to love the boys she looked after.

This window into Hope's life - into his *own* life - was terrifying to Remus, and he wished he'd never read the stupid letter. Still, he read it more than once. He read it every night, for the rest of the term, as if reading the word 'loved' could make him feel it. It couldn't.

The marauders stayed an extra two nights at Hogwarts, for Remus's sake. The first full moon of the summer fell on the 1st July, and it was more convenient (not to mention safer for the Potters) if Remus spent it in the Shrieking Shack. Well, he was *supposed* to be in the Shrieking Shack, but of course Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs had other ideas. Free of exams and excited about the summer, they had one of the best full moon nights they'd had in ages.

Still, Madam Pomfrey insisted on the usual course of aftercare, and knocked Remus out with a strong sleeping draught to ensure he rested through the next morning,

"Travelling by floo powder can make you queasy at the best of times," she cautioned, "Better safe than sorry."

They were due to travel that evening, using the fireplace in McGonagall's office. Remus woke up just after lunch, and found he was not alone.

"Hiya, Moony," Sirius said, softly, sitting in the chair by his bed. His eyes were dark, he looked as though he had been dozing, too.

"Hiya," Remus echoed, sitting up, stretching, "You ought to be in bed, you look knackered."

"Shut up, I look gorgeous," Sirius replied, yawning. "Anyway, James is tearing the bedroom apart trying to pack, I wouldn't get any sleep. Hungry?"

"Always."

"Good, I'm supposed to make sure you eat," he motioned to a plate sitting on the bedside table, loaded with fruit and sandwiches. Remus picked up an apple and bit into it, ravenous.

Neither of them said much for a while, but Sirius ate a few grapes. Since March, they had perfected the art of making small talk with as little detail or eye contact as possible. You could call it a friendship, if you didn't know what had come before.

"I feel a bit bad." Sirius said, out of the blue, looking at his shoelaces.

"Hm?"

"I feel a bit bad about the way I spoke to you, a while ago. About your friend er... Christopher?"

"Yeah." Remus finished his apple core, down the the stem, which he put down, reaching for a sandwich next. Cheese and pickle. "You were a bit rude, but it's ok. I haven't thought about it much."

"Oh, that's good." Sirius nodded. He looked at Remus, then quickly diverted his gaze out of the window. "I thought maybe... I thought he might be the reason you decided to stop."

Remus didn't need to ask what he meant. Sirius was being very clear.

"No." Remus said, choosing his words carefully. "It wasn't to do with him. I told you, he's my friend, that's all."

Sirius nodded, bravely.

"Yeah, I believe you. I do."

He still didn't understand, Remus realised, sadly. He still didn't know why they couldn't just carry on the way they were. Stupid, beautiful, impossible boy.

"Look, Sirius," he said, still cautious, "I just... I've had a bit of a shit year, to be honest. Maybe I'm having a shit life, I dunno. There's a lot of stuff going on at the moment that I can't really control. So the way I see it... if something's making me miserable that I *can* control, then..."

"Oh, right. I get it."

"Yeah?"

"I would never want to make you miserable, Moony."

That's not what I meant. Remus thought, *That's not what I wanted to say.* But he didn't have the energy for more. Didn't have the resources. It would have to do, at least until everything stopped being so raw.

"Are those voices I hear?" Madam Pomfrey came bustling around the hospital curtain, merry and rosy cheeked, "Well! You're looking much better. Looking forward to summer, boys?"

Chapter End Notes

Songs:

- 'First cut is the deepest' by Cat Stevens (performed by PP Arnold)

- 'Mother', by John Lennon

Boots is a chemist in the UK where you can get photos developed.
Plasters are what we call 'band-aids'.

Summer 1977: Part 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Television man is crazy, saying we're juvenile delinquent wrecks,

Oh man! I need TV, when I got T.Rex!

Remus felt strangely untethered, arriving at the Potter's with all of his earthly possessions, moving them into a temporary room. He was going to have to tell *somebody* what had happened – and soon. If he could just get Mr Potter on his own, maybe... but both of James's parents were busier than ever this year, running in and out of the house on errands, or holding secretive meetings which the boys weren't allowed to attend.

"But we're all *of age*," James protested.

"You're still my little boy, though," Mrs Potter kissed his head, patronisingly, as she cleared their breakfast plates.

James looked highly insulted by this babying, but Remus's eyes pricked with tears and he had to excuse himself.

They had a week to prepare for the camping trip, and on the very first day set off into the village to purchase a tent. Remus had never been camping in his life, but still found himself better equipped than James, Sirius or Peter, who were in turns distracted, terrified and fascinated by every single item in the shop. It fell to Remus to talk to the shopkeeper about boring things like ground sheets and pegs and rigging. In the end, he settled for two sensible brown and orange two-man tents, ignoring Sirius's pleading that he consider a blue and green psychedelic number.

The next day, Remus had to check they all had appropriate muggle clothes, seeing as they would be using a muggle campsite, then they got a crash course in cooking from Gully the house elf.

"Can't the *girls* do the cooking?" James whinged, as the foul smell of burnt eggs filled the air. Mrs Potter, who had been watching with amusement came up and slapped him lightly around the head,

"Some man I've raised here," she sniffed, "If you can't cook a young lady breakfast, don't expect her to spend the night."

"Urgh, Mum!" James scowled, repulsed, while Sirius and Remus were bent over laughing.

They filled the rest of the time planning all of the things they would do with their holiday freedom, watching the matinee at the local cinema (there was a Bond film playing, and *Airport '77*, which was Remus's personal favourite) and of course, flying their brooms. Sirius was very impressed by Remus's recent improvement, and they actually managed to organise a very small scale quidditch game (without the snitch, Peter as Keeper).

There was no sign of Moody, this summer. Mr Potter explained over dinner one night that security measures on their house had been increased, and Moody was back in the Auror's office, managing things there. Remus was relieved - he'd tied Moody and Ferox together in his mind, muddled them all up with the Livia encounter and Dumbledore's cruel single mindedness. All in all, after the year

he'd had, Remus was looking forward to a few weeks away from anyone older than him.

It was decided that they would all apparate to Cornwall, except for Peter, who had failed his test. Mrs Potter had kindly offered to take him as a side-along, before disappearing back home, but Peter insisted on taking the Knight bus. This way, he decided, he could collect Dorcas along the way.

The evening before they were set to leave, James, Sirius and Remus squeezed themselves into the red phone box at the end of the Potter's street to coordinate with what Sirius was calling 'the female contingent'.

"Can I press the buttons, Moony?" James asked, running his fingers over the silvery keypad.

"Which bit do you talk into?" Sirius said, holding the receiver up to his eyes for inspection.

"Oh, for goodness sake, you two, calm down..." Remus dialled Lily's home number, snatching the black plastic receiver back. It rang for a bit, and he hoped that Lily would pick up the phone, and not one of her parents.

"Good evening, Evans household?" A young woman answered.

"Lily?"

"Who's speaking, please?"

"Er... Remus Lupin."

There was a very rude snorting laugh, then the person on the other end shouted away from the receiver;

"LILY! It's for *YOU*!"

Remus waited, shifting from foot to foot, Sirius and James watching him eagerly.

"Thanks, Pet," Lily's voice said on the other end.

"Don't be too long, I'm waiting for Vernon to call."

"Hello?" Lily's voice came louder, directly into the phone.

"Hi Lily, it's Remus."

"Hiya Remus! Sorry, that was my sister. Are you all ready?"

"Yep, I think so. Pete's left already I think. You lot?"

"Mary and Marlene got here just before tea. We agreed one o'clock in the afternoon, didn't we?"

"Yeah, one o'clock, just outside the campsite. I made James get a map."

"Oh good. I think mum's letting me borrow the A to Z."

"Cool."

James was tugging on Remus's sleeve. He sighed, "Er, Lily? James and Sirius have never used a phone before, can you talk to them for a minute so they leave me alone?"

Lily laughed,

“Go on then, it’ll wind Pet up.”

Remus leaned back against the glass panes and watched James and Sirius fight over the phone, taking turns to shout something at Lily and then press the receiver to their ears and listen with wonder. Night began to fall around them, and if anyone had walked past they would just have seen three village boys mucking about in a phone box, without a care in the world.

* * *

Saturday 9th July 1977

Remus’s first time apparating outside of Hogwarts could have gone a *bit* better, but at least he didn’t end up in a tree, like James did. He ended up, in fact, about half a mile south of the campsite, on the beach.

He’d been to the seaside before, on summer trips at St Edmund’s – three times to Margate, once to Southend. He couldn’t say he’d particularly enjoyed these outings – or at least he didn’t enjoy them any more than he would have enjoyed sitting in the back garden at St Edmund’s. They were busy, noisy places, full of crying children and barking dogs and strange sugary smells and brightly coloured fairground rides.

This beach was almost deserted, except for a few kids – dots in the distance, really – flying a pink and blue kite. The day was warm enough, the sky was blue and the sand soft and yellow. He knew he ought to start walking towards the campsite, to find the others, but instead he sat down for a few minutes, just to look. The sea wasn’t green, or bright blue, like in picture books – it was more of a concrete kind of grey. Still pretty, glimmering under the midday sun. In the very far distance, Remus could just about make out a long dark shape on the horizon. Was that France? Might be. He could pretend it was.

Remus hadn’t been able to relax, at the Potters. He’d felt like a visitor there; someone who didn’t belong. He didn’t know where he *did* belong. Now that he was seventeen, he could go anywhere he wanted. Would it be nice to live here, in Cornwall? He had recently discovered he’d been born in Bristol, and wondered what it was like there; that was by the sea, too. Remus had never thought he’d live anywhere other than London. Once, he’d thought he would probably never leave Essex.

Eventually, he felt too guilty and had to go and look for the others. The walk was bracing, and after a year of being confined to Hogwarts, it was a thrill just to be able to go somewhere alone. The campsite itself was halfway up the beach, on a long stretch of flat, neatly trimmed grass. A few families had already pitched tents, and the mothers and fathers were sitting outside them in deck chairs, soaking up the rare English summer sun with cups of tea and newspapers standing by.

Mary, Marlene, James and Sirius were sitting on a picnic bench outside the site office, which was little more than a breezeblock hut. Mary and Marlene jumped up when they saw him,

“We thought we’d lost you!”

“Overshot,” he explained, “Landed on the beach - not in the water, luckily.”

“We all ballsed it up, a bit,” Mary laughed, and they each recounted the strange places they’d ended up. Except for Lily, who had arrived in precisely the place she’d meant to. She was inside the office, booking them in.

This done, the party set about finding the perfect place to pitch their tents. James and Sirius

decided this needed to be as close to the beach as possible. Then there was the matter of actually erecting the tents, which was endlessly fascinating to the two pureblood boys.

Lily took charge, channelling her prefect persona, reading out directions and barking out orders.

“No *not* that hook, I said the one in the corner... bloody hell, Black, use the flipping mallet, not your boot! Come on, chop chop, we haven’t got all day...”

“Blimey, Evans,” James grinned, standing with his arms up, holding one of the poles in place while Mary and Marlene tried to get the canvas over it, “Have you ever considered quidditch coaching? You’d be incredible.”

“Please, no,” Marlene called out, muffled under the heavy fabric. “I’ll leave the team if I have to put up with *both* of you blowing whistles at me.”

It took almost two hours, but it was a huge amount of fun, and everyone was very pleased with themselves once all four tents were up in a neat row, facing out to sea.

“Well done, lads,” Lily smiled, sitting cross legged on the grass they waited for the kettle to boil, “And no magic at all. You’ll make muggles yet.”

Peter and Dorcas arrived shortly after that, looking very rumpled and tired from their long journey on the Knight bus.

“It stopped at Guernsey twice before we even started south...” Dorcas explained, looking vaguely disturbed. Peter accepted a cup of tea and sat in silence, yawning.

Once they’d woken up a bit, Mary decided it was time to go to the beach. It was about three o’clock by then, but still very warm, and they had hours of daylight left. The girls disappeared into their tents to get into swimming costumes. Sirius and James had been so excited by the prospect of muggle swimming trunks that they’d been wearing them all day anyway, and Remus – still in jeans and long sleeves – wasn’t planning to take off his clothes under any circumstances.

He did remove his trainers and socks, when they reached the sand, but ignored the other’s pleas to join them in the sea. He was happy enough to sit on the bank, enjoying the warm sun on his back and listening to the seagulls screaming overhead. The girls shrieked too, as they dipped their toes in the icy cold water, and they made a game of running back and forth with the tide, daring each other to get in. James was knocked over by a wave when he wasn’t looking – too busy staring at Lily’s long bare legs. Mind you, Remus caught her throwing a few longing glances at him too. Those muscles were pretty hard to ignore.

Sirius, as usual was in a league of his own. He strode out into the surf as if it was as warm as bathwater, and as soon as he was waist deep, dived right under, sleek and graceful as a fish. He swam long, languid strokes, and came back looking happier than Remus had seen him in a long time.

Afterwards, wrapped in towels, the girls showed the pureblood boys how to build a sandcastle without any magic, and James and Peter became extremely invested in creating a complicated irrigation system to ensure that the moat was properly supplied at all times.

Back at the tents they cooked dinner – thankfully Marlene and Dorcas offered to supervise this, frying bacon over a little gas burner Lily’s father had donated. James and Lily went off to the shop – ostensibly for milk – and returned with a case of cider.

“Muggle drinks, too?!” Sirius exclaimed.

“We’re getting a fully rounded experience, apparently,” James laughed. Lily giggled then blushed and looked away.

Remus could already see where the evening was heading, and sat himself as far away from Sirius as possible. They’d already agreed that Sirius and James would share one tent, with Peter and Remus in the other, so at least there would be no awkwardness there. He just had to watch his drinking.

Mary had lit a fire using magic while Lily had been gone (“no one tell her, all right? I’m not about to sit here freezing my snatch off while Potter and Black piss about rubbing sticks together.”), and Marlene had brought a wireless radio, so once the cans of cider had been passed around it was a very cosy scene indeed.

“How long have you two been going out?” Dorcas asked James and Lily. They leapt apart, looking at each other guiltily.

“We’re not!” Lily squeaked, moving to sit next to Remus, as if to prove it. Mary and Marlene exchanged a look, and Sirius shot a confused glance at James.

“Oh, sorry!” Dorcas smiled, oblivious, “I just thought... but Sirius and Mary, *you* used to go out, right?”

“For my sins,” Mary squawked, laughing. Sirius poked his tongue out at her.

Marlene, who had been reading a guidebook she’d bought in the visitor’s information centre, cleared her throat loudly,

“There’s a castle ruin not far from here, we could go tomorrow?” Which swiftly changed the subject to plans for the rest of the week. Camping holidays seemed to involve a lot of walking, Remus realised. He hoped his hip would be up to it.

A few tins in and they were all in a very silly mood. The drink was flat and clear, which Remus knew was a dangerous sign when it came to cider. They’d all have skull-splitting headaches in the morning if they weren’t careful. He didn’t bring it up, though - everyone was so happy, why spoil it worrying about consequences?

Dorcas was lying back on Peter’s chest, using him as an armchair, humming softly to the music. He was trying to get his hand under her shirt, and thought he was being discreet. Mary and Marlene were whispering to each other, bursting into giggles every now and then. James and Sirius were throwing stones into the fire – it was obviously a competition of sorts, but Remus couldn’t figure out what the rules were supposed to be.

A familiar tune began to play on the radio – Mott the Hoople. It was a few years old now, but it had been a favourite at Gryffindor parties,

“Billy rapped all night about his suicide,

How he’d kick it in the head when he was twenty-five,

Speed jive, don’t wanna stay alive, when you’re twenty five...”

“Turn it up!” Mary nudged Marlene, who flicked her wand at the wireless, lazily, then cracked open another can. They all hushed to listen, nodding along and tapping their feet softly on the grass. When the chorus came, the girls all sang along in that soft, under the breath way that girls were so good at,

“All the young dudes, carry the news...”

When the song finished they cheered drunkenly, laughing amongst themselves.

“I bloody love you lot,” Marlene slurred, “You’re all my best friends,”

“Same to you, McKinnon,” Sirius grinned across the flames, raising his can.

“Shhh!” She wagged a drunken finger at him, dopily, “I know *your* game, Black. I’ll have you know, you’re not my type.”

Everybody laughed at that, even Sirius.

“When are we going to find *you* a nice girl, hm Remus?” Lily said, thoughtfully, squeezing up to him for warmth and laying her head on his shoulder.

He smiled wanly, putting an affectionate arm around her.

“Yeah, you deserve a bit of fun, Moony,” James winked at him.

Remus avoided Sirius sudden glare by taking another swig from his can.

“I have plenty of fun with you lot.” He said.

“Have you *ever* had a girlfriend, Remus?” Dorcas asked. She didn’t mean anything by it; she didn’t know them very well. But there was an awkward hush all the same. Or maybe Remus was the only one who noticed. He glanced up at Mary coyly and smiled.

“Nah,” he said.

“Aww,” Dorcas said, very tipsy, “How come?”

Suddenly, it dawned on Remus. Marlene was right – he *loved* these people, every one of them. What was the point, keeping secrets from them? This wasn’t up to Sirius, this wasn’t up to anyone but him. He breathed in and looked at the fire again.

“I’m gay.” He said.

Peter choked on his drink. Out of the corner of his eye, Remus saw James run his hands through his hair, sit up straighter. He saw Mary’s mouth fall open, and heard Marlene give out a surprised hiccup. He dared not look at Sirius. His stomach turned and he prepared to get up, to walk away and apparate somewhere. Anywhere.

But then Lily raised her head. She kissed his cheek and hugged him tighter, before settling back down against his shoulder.

“You still deserve some fun.” She said, decisively.

Chapter End Notes

Song is (of course!) All the Young Dudes, written by Bowie, performed by Mott the Hoople.

The A to Z is a popular road map in the UK.

Summer 1977: Part 2

*Sweet handsome friend, I can tell you truly
that I've never been without desire
since it pleased you that I have you as my lover;
nor did a time ever arrive, sweet handsome friend,
when I didn't want to see you often;
nor did I ever feel regret,
nor did it ever come to pass, if you went off angry,
that I felt joy until you had come back;
nor [ever].*

- Tibors de Sarenom

Two hours later...

Peter and Dorcas were snogging, rolling backwards onto the grass. Everyone was drunk, but they were probably the drunkest.

“Go back to your tent, if you’re going to do that!” James threw an empty cider can at them.

“D’you mind, Moony?” Peter surfaced, red in the face and bleary eyed, “If we go back to ours? You can bunk in with Prongs and Padfoot, can’t you?”

“Oh, don’t worry,” Remus waved a hand, “I’ll find somewhere.” Sirius still hadn’t looked at him, and he had a feeling that after the evening’s revelations he would not be particularly welcome.

Peter and Dorcas disappeared, there was muffled giggling from within the tent, then the ghostly, hollow quiet of a silencing charm.

“Share with us if you want, Remus?” Mary said, getting up to leave for her own tent. Lily nodded,

“Yeah, our tent’s much bigger – come in with us.”

“Thanks girls,” He smiled – he really was grateful. “You go on – I’m not tired yet. Think I’ll just go for a walk.”

He got up, limbs stiff and aching, and headed for the sea. It was properly dark now, away from the fire, but Remus had always been able to see in the dark. The tide was in, and louder than ever. A cold breeze flew forth, and he fumbled in his back pocket for a cigarette. He lit up and inhaled deeply, closing his eyes, feeling that now he could really *think*.

He was glad he’d said it, no matter what the reaction, but he still considered leaving. Ok, so they weren’t all about to kick his head in, but who knew how they’d all act in the cold light of morning,

stark and sober. Was it better or worse than being a werewolf?

He could still apparate, if he wanted to; go and look for Grant, maybe. Remus felt a surge of guilt. He hadn't thought about Grant in a while – maybe not all year. The other boy had been so kind to him; taken him in and been willing to put him up indefinitely. He'd given Remus some excellent advice too, if only Remus had taken it. *Stay away from posh boys.*

“Alright, Moony?” James approached him. Remus turned. Sirius was with him, looking sheepish. It looked as though James had dragged him over against his will. Remus wasn't surprised.

“Alright,” he nodded. He offered James a cigarette. James shook his head, no.

“Just... wanted to see you were ok.”

“Fine, thanks.”

“Good.”

“Sorry if I made things awkward.”

“You didn't!” James said, a little too eagerly, as if he'd been hoping Remus would bring it up first. Sirius winced, but only Remus noticed. “Honestly, mate, we're glad you told us, really.”

Remus just nodded, and looked back at the sea, taking another drag on his cigarette. Behind him, he heard James nudging Sirius, obviously trying to get him to say something reassuring and friendly, but to no avail.

James spoke again, “Don't run off, ok, Moony?”

Remus turned back, raising an eyebrow. James was grinning, “Yeah, we know what you're like. Stay, ok? Everything's fine. Even Pete wasn't that bothered.”

“Pete,” Remus snorted, “He's too busy trying to get his end away.”

“Can't blame him.” James laughed. He touched Remus's shoulder, “D'you want to talk about it?”

Remus shook his head, looking down. He stubbed out his cigarette and immediately lit another. Sirius wanted one, he could tell. But Remus was feeling belligerent, and unless Black *asked*, like a normal human being, he wasn't going to get one.

“Thanks, James.” Remus said, pointedly, exhaling smoke, “You're a real mate.”

“Still marauders.” James smiled, tiredly. He yawned, “I think I'm gonna turn in. Coming?”

“I'm going to have another one after this.” Remus raised his second cigarette.

“I'll have one too.” Sirius said, gruffly. James nodded, stifling another yawn, and turned away.

“Don't come back stinking of fag ash, you two.” He threw over his shoulder, as he walked back towards the campfire on the turf.

Remus returned his gaze to the sea, but handed Sirius the box. He heard him withdraw a cigarette, light up, inhale. He waited for it.

“...Why'd you say that?” Sirius said.

Remus closed his eyes and smiled softly. He didn't want a fight, but he was ready for one - he was always ready.

"Wanted to. I just had to know what they'd think, one way or another."

"It's like you've just gone and changed everything around on me." He didn't sound accusatory. He sounded hurt.

"Didn't mean to." Remus said.

"Were you expecting me to say something too?"

"No, I wasn't expecting anything." Remus snapped. "It wasn't anything to do with you, actually."

"Ok, ok." Sirius raised his hands in surrender, still looking uncomfortable. "Just... I just thought you might have told *me* first, that's all. Given the... situation."

This caught Remus entirely off guard, and he finally looked at Sirius,

"You mean you didn't already know?! How could you not know?!"

"You said you weren't." Sirius shrugged. "Like I said *I* wasn't. Thought we were both on the same page, that's all."

Remus found his anger returning. Typical Sirius, never thinking about anything more than his own personal gratification, never once considering that anyone else had feelings or thoughts.

"Obviously we weren't." He said, coldly. "Anyway, I don't see how it matters now. If *that's* all you're worried about, then don't. You're safe." Remus said, stonily. "I'm not going to tell anyone about you and me, and I doubt anyone suspects you, what with your *considerable* history with girls. I don't see why you care so much what *I* tell people."

"I do *care*." Sirius protested.

Remus closed his eyes. A few months ago, that would have sounded wonderful. But *god*, he was so tired.

"Remus?!" Sirius sounded half annoyed, half frightened, "I *can* care about you and not... y'know, not scream it from the rooftops."

"Wanting to get off with me isn't the same as caring."

"Remus! Fucking hell, just because I'm not... I haven't got wherever you have, yet. It doesn't mean I don't have the same... ugh, fuck's sake." Sirius cursed at his own inarticulacy.

"And all the girls?" Remus tutted.

"That's... that's different."

"Ok." Remus sighed, his voice empty. He was willing to leave it there. Sirius wasn't.

"You don't understand."

Remus didn't say anything. He didn't see that he *had* to understand. He just had to be the stronger one here.

Sirius continued, a hand on Remus's arm. "When I think about myself with them, I can just... see it, y'know? I know how it's going to play out. I know what I'm s'posed to do. When I think about me and you... you know, the *real* me and you. It's just... I can't see how it ends. I just tried not to think about it. So, I *know* I was a bit of a dick, I could have handled it better, but I swear, I didn't want it to end like that." His breathing was shallow now, Remus could hear his heartrate increasing by the second, "I didn't want it to end at all, to be honest."

Remus nodded. He pushed Sirius's hand away, gently, looking out at the sea. He knew Sirius was staring at him, but he kept facing forward.

"Look, Sirius, I don't mean to be cruel, I *do* understand all that." He really did - hadn't he been over it all, in his own head? "I know it's not easy for you."

Sirius made a noise of relief at that, seemed to relax slightly. Maybe they were getting somewhere for once.

Remus pushed on, "But... it *is* easy for me. I'm queer, ok? I know when we started I said I wasn't and... well I shouldn't have said that, because I am. And I'm not saying *you're* queer too, or you have to be, or anything, but I couldn't carry on the way we were without you... just, I dunno, *acknowledging* it."

Sirius was watching him very closely as he said this, thinking hard. Remus knew how he looked when he was thinking; when he was working a problem through. It wasn't mischievous, or cheeky, or sarcastic, it was deeply solemn and serious. It was really bloody sexy, actually, but Remus tried to ignore that bit.

Finally, done thinking, Sirius gave a short nod.

"Ok then." He said, simply.

"What?!" Remus frowned.

"Fucking acknowledged. Message received." Sirius stubbed out his cigarette in the wet sand.

"So... what?" Remus gaped, "We just leave things as they are?"

Sirius scratched behind his ear, looking down, a strange, shy gesture.

"I'd rather not."

"You'd rather not." Remus repeated, dumbfounded.

"No. I mean, if you want me to go 'round telling everyone I know then sorry, but we're not all as ballsy as you. I need more time. But... I could *try*."

"You could try." This was not the outcome Remus had expected when the conversation began. "What do you m--"

Sirius cut him off, placing a palm on Remus's cheek to turn it towards him, and kissing him gently on the lips.

"I mean I will try." He said, as he pulled away. "I *miss* you, Moony."

Oh, you would go and say something like that... Remus grabbed him and pulled him back. It was like water after a drought, shelter in a storm - they were the still point of the turning world and

every other stupid sloppy cliché you could think of. They kissed for a long time, and when they came apart they were practically gasping with relief.

“No more girls?” Remus asked, still holding Sirius in place, as if he might run away.

“No more girls.” Sirius agreed. “Let’s see how this pans out first.”

“Oh, charming.” Remus let go, satisfied.

“Shuddup,” Sirius nudged him with his shoulder, hands deep inside his pockets. “C’mon, let’s go back to the tent eh? Freezing.”

They walked towards the tents and the dying fire with their backs to the wind.

“I think I’m drunk,” Remus said, shakily. He felt all stirred up. “I make bad decisions when I’m drunk.”

Sirius laughed and squeezed his shoulder quickly,

“I know. I promise this isn’t one of them.”

“Ok.” *I’m trusting you...*

Unfortunately, they found that none of the tents were available any more. The tent Remus had been sharing with Pete was well and truly occupied, by the sounds of it. Sirius grimaced, and cast a fresh silencing spell over the flagging one.

“Amateurs.” He muttered.

There was a silencing spell cast over James and Sirius’s tent too. Mary poked her head out of the next one along, giggling,

“It’s James and Lily!”

“Are you serious?!” Sirius gaped. “Bloody hell. I mean... wow, I sort of want to go in and shake his hand.”

“I’ve a feeling his hands are busy,” Remus raised an eyebrow.

“Want to get in with me, Remus?” Mary asked, tipsily.

“What about Sirius?”

“Oh, right... ugh fine, I’ll get in with Marls. Night, lads.” She crawled across the grass into Marlene’s tent.

Sirius and Remus looked at each other for a few moments, before Sirius climbed in first. The girls’ tent was much more comfortable than theirs, stuffed with blankets and pillows and a plump blow up mattress.

“Knew we should have got the muggleborns to sort us out.” Sirius grumbled, as he settled in. The mattress was old and sank slightly in the middle, rolling them together in an almost comical way. In the end, the only way to get comfortable was to curl up like spoons.

“This ok?” Remus asked, as he slipped an arm around Sirius’s waist.

“Of course.” Sirius replied.

“We could just sleep...”

“*Sonoro Quiescis.*”

“Ah, ok...”

Well. It had been a while.

Afterwards, Remus felt more awake than he ever had in his life. His brain was buzzing with questions, declarations, thoughts, *words*. It felt like coming out of hiding, like pulling back a disguise he had worn too long. He wanted to bear every bit of himself to Sirius; he wanted Sirius to *see* him,

“Sirius?”

“Mmhh?”

“There’s something else I need to tell you.”

“Oh merlin,” Sirius groaned, rolling onto his back, sleepily, “What now?”

“I’m um... well, I’m homeless.”

“What?!” Sirius opened his eyes and turned around at once, “What??”

“Since I turned seventeen. Y’know, I’m of age now, so...”

“So they just chucked you out?”

Remus nodded, glad to share the problem.

“Yeah, so once Hogwarts finishes next summer I’ve got nowhere to go...”

“Bastards.” Sirius said angrily. He looked at Remus very seriously, “You can stay with me and James, at the Potters. They won’t mind, I know they won’t. Then when school’s finished we’ll find our own place.”

“We will?!” Remus raised his eyebrows.

“Yeah!” Sirius replied, happily, folding his arms behind his head, “It’ll be just like school - you, me, James and Pete, all together.”

“Oh,” Remus realised what he’d meant. “Yeah, sounds great. I’ve a bit of money Lyall left me.”

“Pfft.” Sirius replied, “I’ve got enough money for *all* of us, don’t worry about that.”

“Ok,” Remus said. “I won’t worry.”

“Go to sleep,” Sirius said, “Or you’ll be knackered tomorrow.”

“Ok,” Remus repeated, closing his eyes.

Summer 1977: Part 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus woke up and stretched beneath bright canvas, Sirius breathing lightly beside him. It was a little bit too warm and sticky, but he wouldn't have moved for anything. Lying peacefully under the blankets, he could still taste the salt on Sirius's skin, feel his heartbeat. At the bottom of the sleeping bag, their feet were tangled together.

Sirius stirred, screwing up his face before he opened his eyes.

"Morning."

"Morning."

"Fuck me, my mouth is dry."

"Yeah, mine too," Remus agreed, running his tongue over his teeth. All that cider. "I could go and get some water from the pump?"

"Yeah, we'll both go. Reckon anyone else is up?"

Remus listened carefully, then shook his head. He hoped Sirius wasn't worried about getting caught - surely no one could question their sharing a tent? What else could they have done? It was probably a *bit* early to start interrogating Sirius, so Remus held his tongue as they dressed quietly and quickly, fishing about in the bottom of the bed for their clothes, which seemed to have scattered in the night.

Clambering out and blinking hard against the bright daylight, Remus thought that everything seemed to look different. The same; but not quite as he'd remembered it before. More realistic; solid and anchored down.

They sauntered off in the direction of the water pump with their canteens, and as they walked, they fell into step, and Remus felt as though his heart would burst with joy. Stupid, really, such a small thing. The campsite was lovely and peaceful, sparrows darting between the trees overhead, and the occasional camper popping their head out and wishing a polite 'good morning' to the boys as they passed.

The water pump was by the shower block, and they both ducked in to wash their faces quickly, before filling their canteens, as well as the others they'd brought.

"Shop sells pasties," Sirius said, thoughtfully, nodding in the direction of a little wooden hut with a blue and white striped awning, "Shall we get some for breakfast, return to the camp as heroes?"

"Good idea," Remus smiled, shyly.

They bought far too many Cornish pasties, but they were fresh out of the oven, flaky and buttery and warm, and Sirius had no impulse control.

Back at the tents, no one had stirred yet, apparently, so Remus and Sirius decided they would take their breakfast on the beach. They sat on a sand dune, side by side, munching peacefully and licking the grease from their fingers afterwards.

"I could get used to this," Sirius said with a grin, rubbing his hands on his jeans, sighing happily at the view. The sand had been washed clean overnight by the tide. Everything was perfect and unblemished. "Never been on a proper holiday before."

"Me neither."

Remus wiped his own hands on his corduroy trousers and picked restlessly at the grass.

"Oi," Sirius said, "What's up Moony? We said no worrying."

"Sorry."

"What's up?"

"I was just wondering something. It's stupid, don't worry."

They were quiet again. Remus fidgeted some more. He sighed. "Why me?" He asked, quietly.

"Hm?"

"...why me, in the first place? Why not James, or... literally *anyone* else? Is it just because... is it because I let you? Path of least resistance?"

"Obviously not." Sirius scoffed, frowning. "What do you mean why not James? I don't *fancy* James."

"You... oh."

"I think we can at least admit we fancy each other." Sirius raised an eyebrow, thumbing Remus's hip through the thin fabric of his t-shirt. Remus nodded,

"Yeah. I just thought. I dunno."

"We never touched, much."

"What?"

"Before all the shagging." Sirius said, matter-of-factly. "I used to wrestle with James all the time, and we used to share a bed sometimes and everything. Not you. You kept yourself separate. No touching."

"I was... shy."

"It got me curious, I s'pose. One Christmas, remember when Andromeda came to the Potters? I was really nervy, convinced my mother was coming to get me every five minutes, I jumped whenever the door went."

"I remember." Remus said, softly. "Third year."

"Well, the door went, and I was bricking it, we were on the landing, I think. You sort of squeezed my shoulder and... well it just felt really nice. It meant more, because it was you. I felt like you'd... I dunno, chosen me, or something. Couldn't get you out of my head for weeks."

"We were fourteen!"

"So?"

“You and Mary started going out not long after that.”

“Yeah, look how that turned out.” Sirius huffed a laugh. Remus laughed too, despite himself.

“Then on your birthday,” Sirius said, his voice faltering a bit, as if it was a difficult thing for him to talk about. “You... you kissed me.”

“I did.” Remus replied, steadily. “Sorry.”

“I didn't expect it, it was so out of the blue. I'd been thinking about you, before that, but I didn't really know... I didn't know that I was thinking about *that*. Then I thought... maybe it was my fault, like I'd given off some message, like I'd tricked you into it or something.”

“What?! No! Trust me, I very much wanted to kiss you.”

“Oh. Good. Because I just felt so awful about it, y'know - it was your first kiss, and I went and mucked it all up.”

“Er...” Remus sighed, “Look, while we're being honest, you might as well know - it wasn't my first kiss.”

“What?!”

“Yeah... the summer before, I sort of met someone. I never told any of you. I didn't... I didn't want you to know I was queer.”

“That boy.” Sirius said, suddenly, “At the muggle squat, in Mile End.”

“His name's Grant.” Remus explained.

“Well, I hate him.”

Remus laughed.

“That's ok, he's so nice he won't even mind.”

“I hate him even more.”

“I ought to try and see him this summer. He's been so good to me, you don't even know the half of it.”

“I'll go with you, if you want.”

“...thanks, that's kind.”

“Moony,” Sirius said, quietly.

“Mm?”

“I'm really sorry about everything.”

“It's ok.”

“It's not.”

“It is.”

“It's n—”

“Sirius! For god’s sake, you can’t even apologise without starting a fight. I’m telling you – it’s ok. I was being unfair. I think... I think I was asking you for something I don’t even understand properly myself. Loyalty or love or whatever.”

“I do *love* you, Moony. I love all of you; you, James, Peter.”

“Yeah,” Remus sighed. He closed his eyes, as if to re-set the conversation. When he opened them again, Sirius looked anxious. Remus smiled, reassuringly, “Looking forward to seventh year?”

“Dunno. Bit scary, isn’t it?”

“You mean the war?”

“The war.” Sirius agreed, “Other stuff too. Last year before we have to grow up.”

Remus laughed, softly,

“I don’t think you’ll ever grow up, Padfoot.”

“I’ve been so selfish.” Sirius had turned melancholy again.

“I said it’s fine.”

“It’s not, though,” his brow creased slightly, as he searched for the words he needed. Remus held his breath, not sure what was coming, but somehow knowing he needed to hear it. “You have so many secrets, and it must be so shit, keeping things back,” Sirius began, gaining momentum the more he spoke, “And I made it all worse, I just gave you more things to hide...”

I’ve loved keeping your secret, Remus wanted to say, *I’d keep a thousand more, for you*. He knew that this line of thinking could only make things worse, so he said nothing. Sirius risked reaching out, grasping Remus’s hand and holding it. Remus squeezed back.

“It’s not that I’m ashamed of you, or this, it’s... a million other things. I wish I could tell *everyone*, I wish I was ready. I will be, Moony, I promise.”

Sirius looked at him, full of pleading. Remus forgave him wholeheartedly. It wasn’t difficult to meet his eyes any more.

“James seemed... pretty ok with me being queer.” Remus prompted, quietly. He felt a bit underhanded, bringing up James - James belonged to Sirius, it wasn’t Remus’s business to interfere.

“Of course he was, the beautiful bastard,” Sirius snorted, “Fucking prince among men, isn’t he? I know. I know he’d probably be fine with this, even,” he gripped Remus’s fingers, “But... He’s my *best* friend, and I just don’t want that to change yet. I wouldn’t want to be alone with him and have him wondering... Even if *he* wasn’t thinking about it, I would be.”

“Ok,” Remus said. He was agreeing to everything, he knew it was stupid. But it was so easy now.

“Morning, lads!” Mary yelled from the campsite, Sirius pulled his hand back, quickly, giving Remus an apologetic glance, “Cheers for the pasties!”

They both turned around and waved at her. Sirius got up, extending an arm to help Remus to his feet.

“C’mon,” he said, eyes twinkling, “I can’t wait to rip the shit out of Prongs for finally getting his

leg over.”

“Not in front of Lily!” Remus cautioned, “She’ll curse your knob of.”

“Well, can’t have that, I’m very attached to my knob.”

“Sirius?”

“Remus?”

“This isn’t just for the summer, is it?”

Sirius looked at him and grinned.

“I bloody hope not.”

Fortunately, no one was much interested in whatever Sirius and Remus had been up to the night before, because everybody else's night had been just as eventful. Peter gave him a bit of a wary look, but that might have been the hangover. Mary was grinning at everyone like the cat who’d got the cream, picking at her pasty and trying to catch Lily’s eye.

Marlene was bundled up in blankets, looking very green around the gills and giving out the occasional moan.

“Alright, Marls?” Remus asked, gently.

“Mmmmph.”

“Poor love,” Mary tutted, patting her friend’s blonde head gently, “Went a bit hard on the Old Rosie, didn’t you? Still, could be worse. Dorcas hasn’t come back from the loo’s, yet.”

James and Lily were sitting next to each other, but not too close. Lily had scraped her hair back in a pigtail, and was consciously staring at the ground, eating her pasty with a kind of quiet resignation. James looked absolutely chuffed, but was trying not to show it too much.

“So...” Mary grinned, widely, looking around at everyone, “We’ll stick with the new sleeping arrangements for the rest of the week, then, shall we?”

“Suits me.” Sirius said, casually.

“And me,” Peter nodded, mouth full of mince.

Marlene gave a silent, queasy thumbs up. James and Lily looked at each other, then looked away.

Once everyone had finished eating, the girls arranged an expedition to the shower block. The boys followed after, towels under their arms and Sirius teased James mercilessly.

“No, go away, I’m not telling you anything.” James laughed.

“This is purely for academic purposes,” Sirius chided, “It’s going to be a matter of historical interest, future generations will need to know what miraculous feats you had to perform in order to finally convince Evans to--”

“We just *talked*!”

“Oh, so the silencing spell was for...?”

James turned bright red and disappeared inside a shower cubicle. Sirius chuckled triumphantly.

“Doesn’t anyone want to know about me and Dorcas?” Peter asked, innocently.

* * *

The castle ruins were about five miles walk, which nobody seemed to think was too far at all. Marlene had perked up a bit after showering and eating, and everyone decided that fresh air was probably the best cure for a hangover. They zipped up their tents, stuffing valuables into rucksacks - along with some leftover pasties and bottles of water - and set off around eleven.

They followed a footpath along the shoreline, which curled around and gradually steepened into a cliff. The view at the top was breath-taking, but Remus was struggling to enjoy it much - his eyes watered and his legs burned with the effort of clambering uphill. Sirius, Marlene and Mary had raced to the top; Marlene coming first despite her queasiness. James surprised Remus by slowing down to match his own shambling crawl.

“Alright there, Moony?” He asked, cheerfully,

“Brilliant,” Remus panted, not sure if he was pulling off sarcasm or just sounded like a terrible liar.

“We’re in no rush, take it easy.”

“Hmmpf.”

“Padfoot wasn’t too much of a tosser last night, was he? About the whole... er... about the stuff you told us?”

Remus shook his head, focussing on breathing, and the horrible *grind-click* noise that had started happening in his hip every time he stepped forward.

“Good,” James nodded, relieved, “I just worried he might be, y’know what his family was like about that kind of thing. Was in two minds about leaving him alone with you to be honest, but I thought you’d just give him a thump if he got out of order.”

“Everything’s fine,” Remus wheezed, “Don’t worry.”

“Good.” James said again, and stopped, because Remus had. Just for a moment.

The other six had crested the hill now, and were disappearing down the other side. They’d only been walking for twenty minutes, Remus thought grimly. He wondered if he could apparate ahead - but the ‘deliberation’ part would be difficult, without a map, or having seen the place before. He was embarrassed, having James stay back with him, but at least it wasn’t one of the girls.

“Sorry,” he said, wiping sweat from his brow, “Usually not as bad this far away from the moon.”

“S’fine,” James shrugged, “We’re on holiday, not a route march.”

“Don’t you want to catch up with Lily? I’ll be fine.”

“Giving her a bit of space. I think she’s embarrassed.”

“She really likes you, though,” Remus said, encouragingly, “She told me.”

“I know,” James smiled, getting that dopey, dreamy look as he stared over the clifftop, “Can’t believe my bloody luck.” He cleared his throat, “But it was *just* talking, all right? that’s the party

line, don't say anything to Black."

Remus laughed, straightening up,

"I won't." They began to walk again, steadily. The sun was reaching its highest point, blazing above them so that they had to squint, or look at their feet.

"We talked about you, actually," James said. "Well, Lily did. I listened."

"Oh?"

"Yeah - nothing horrible, I promise! I think it was probably just the cider and we were both rambling about how you were such a good mate, and then she said something about being brave and making your feelings known and living honestly, or... oh, I dunno, I was too busy being amazed she was even talking to me."

Remus smiled at James, and wanted to hug him on Lily's behalf.

They reached the castle two hours later, a good half an hour behind the rest of the group, who had waited for them.

"Sorry," Sirius said, once they were out of earshot of the others, "I didn't think."

"I'm fine," Remus smiled, trying to hide his exhaustion, "I had Prongs."

"There's a local bus that goes back past the campsite, I checked," Sirius said, gallantly, "We can get that back, if you want?"

"I'm *fine*."

The castle was a ruin, beautiful grey stone in the summer sunshine, cast against the glistening sea, hundreds of feet below. Remus could barely believe anyone had really lived there - the narrow spiral staircases had crumbled and led nowhere, long grass and bright yellow dandelions had invaded what might once have been a great feasting hall. There were arrow slits in the remaining walls, and graffiti carved into the parapets, where no doubt some bored soldier had waited once, a thousand years ago. Perhaps he hadn't been much older than they were. War never changed.

James, Peter and Sirius began a very enthusiastic sword fight with some stray sticks they'd found, while Remus sat rolling up cigarettes on a pile of rocks, watching them.

"You'd feel a lot fitter if you didn't fill your lungs up with that shit," Marlene tutted.

"Here for a good time, not a long time, Marls," he replied, dryly, licking the adhesive strip on his paper and sticking it down carefully.

He made four or five, just to pass the time, tucking them neatly into an old matchbox he'd saved for the purpose. He watched Sirius, playing the knight against Peter's dragon, and laughed as James captured Lily - apparently now a princess - hoisting her effortlessly over his shoulder and running for the castle gates. She laughed and beat her fists against his back playfully, and when he put her down she looked so happy in his arms.

Eventually, some of the other tourists started to get a bit annoyed with the eight teenagers mucking about, so they decided it was time to go back down to the beach and spend the rest of the afternoon cooling off in the sea.

Lily and James led the group this time, hand in hand, chattering happily as if they had been this intimate for years. A pang of envy shot through Remus. Not that he wanted to hold Sirius's hand. For one thing, it was much too hot, for another, you couldn't keep Sirius still long enough.

"You lot go ahead," Sirius called, "Me and Moony are having a fag break."

Marlene tutted once more, but hurried to catch up with the others.

Remus and Sirius sat on a stone wall for a bit, smoking.

"There's a pub down there," Sirius nodded further up the lane. "Saw it on the way up, it's got a garden. Want to go and waste some time?"

"Yeah," Remus said, surprised. That sounded ideal. "But don't you want to catch up with James?"

"James doesn't love me anymore," Sirius sighed, dramatically, holding his wrist against his forehead like an old woman about to faint, "His heart has been claimed by another."

Remus laughed, then dared to say,

"Oh well. you've got me."

"I've got you," Sirius nodded with a grin, hopping down from the wall. "C'mon, then. Could murder a pint."

The pub was a small whitewashed cottage with mustard yellow shutters, a red tile roof and a neat row of red geraniums planted in pots outside. Inside was dark, musty and cavernous; Remus had to duck under the low ceiling. The gruff working men propping up the bar all turned to look as they entered, and for a moment Remus wondered if it had been a bad idea after all.

Still, Sirius ordered two pints of lager, and they took them outside to the garden, sitting on a table underneath a beech tree for shade. As they headed out, the surly barman and unfriendly locals turned back to their own drinks, obviously deciding to ignore the two boys. Remus was sure he heard one of them mutter 'bloody toffs,' which he took as a personal slight, though of course it could have been much worse. Still, they were alone in the garden, and had the privacy they'd been seeking.

Sirius was impervious to the attitudes of others - maybe he didn't notice; maybe he just didn't think muggles were worth worrying about.

"It's great here," he said, gulping down his foggy, warm beer, "D'you think we could live here, when it's all over?"

"I like London," Remus replied, "It's what I'm used to."

"Remember you promised we could go to Carnaby Street," Sirius said, playing with Remus's matchbox, "This summer. I'm holding you to it."

"When did I say that?"

"Christmas."

"Oh, right. Ok, we'll go."

"I can't believe you forgot."

“Well you also spent half of Christmas trying to convince me to get a girlfriend, so...”

“Uggh,” Sirius groaned, apparently in shame, “Sorry. I thought it might help me er... feel less attached to you. Sounds a bit bonkers now I think about it...”

“*Now* it sounds bonkers,” Remus kicked him gently under the table.

“Logical thought processes are not my forte, Mr Moony,” Sirius laughed, with an aristocratic turn of his head, “You ought to make your peace with it if we’re going to... um... if we’re going to...”

“Start going out...” Remus prompted, gently. Sirius gave him an apologetic smile,

“Going out, yeah.” He agreed. “Sorry.”

“You’ll get there,” Remus said, casually, gulping his pint.

And with that, the ice was broken, and they began to talk. And talk, and talk. It was that easy; after months of failure to communicate, it seemed that the gates had now been flung open wide. They found that once they had begun, they couldn’t stop. Remus would relate some assumption he had made; some belief he had held about an interaction long ago, and what he thought it had meant at the time. And Sirius would shake his head with wide, earnest eyes and say;

“But Moony, it wasn’t like that *at all*.”

When it came down to brass tacks, Remus discovered that much of his misery was his own making; that most of the time Sirius had never meant harm, and often hadn’t even known he was causing Remus any pain at all - it was just his own bungled idea of what was going on. They even talked about Mary.

“I really did like her,” he said, “I think that’s what threw me off, in the beginning. Y’know, it wasn’t like girls weren’t *doing it* for me, in that department... and she was so confident.”

“I thought you were just with her because you didn’t want to be with me.”

“No.” Sirius said, firmly, “That’s a horrible thought. It was for her, not for you.” He looked at him, “Sorry.”

“Ha, don’t be. That makes me feel better, actually.”

“Anyway,” Sirius smirked, “What about *you* and Mary?”

“Oh god,” Remus buried his face in his hands, “Don’t. I’m so embarrassed.”

“It’s fine. I liked it.” Sirius raised an eyebrow, giving Remus a look so sultry it would probably get him arrested in some parts of the country.

“I noticed.” He blushed, “Didn’t help you feel less attached, then?”

“Apparently not.”

“I couldn’t believe you didn’t mind that. And yet, when you found out about Chris...”

Sirius straightened up, looking annoyed,

“Him.” He grumbled.

“There’s nothing between us. We’re just friends.”

“And... this other bloke... Grant? Was he...” Sirius shifted, obviously uncomfortable as he struggled to get the word out, “Your boyfriend?”

“Not really,” Remus replied, easily, “It’s hard to explain. He’s... a friend. I care about him as much as I do you, and James, and Peter, and the girls.”

“More secrets, Remus.” Sirius ran his hands through his hair, frustrated, “I can’t keep track, I dunno how you do it. Can you stop hiding stuff? From me, at least?”

“I don’t know.” Remus said, quietly, “It’ll be hard.”

“But you can try.” Sirius smiled. Remus chuckled, and nodded.

They finished their drinks, and decided to head back to the campsite.

“I’ll teach you to swim.” Sirius offered.

“Fuck off, will you.” Remus snorted.

“Is there anything else you’ve been keeping secret, eh, Remu?” Sirius nudged him, as they meandered slowly downhill. It was much easier, the way back, but they were going very slowly anyway.

“Nope,” Remus laughed. He felt light as air - it was like being high; having nothing to hide at all, “Queer, illiterate, homeless, werewolf...” he ticked them off on his fingers, “I think that’s it. Oh, and my mother.”

“Your mother?!”

“I got a letter, in that box of depressing stuff from Dumbledore. Photos, and a letter - an apology.”

“Oh, blimey, ok. What did it--”

“No, I don’t want to talk about it yet. Sorry.”

“Fine,” Sirius shrugged, “Let’s say we can talk about anything at all, except our mothers.”

“Perfect.” Remus nodded.

Chapter End Notes

- Old Rosie is cider, and if you drink too much of it you will regret it.
- Cornish pasties are the pinnacle of British cuisine.
- The incident Sirius is referring to (which triggered his interest in Remus) happened in Chapter 51.

Summer 1977: Part 4

Chapter Summary

CW for themes of homophobia in this chapter.

The rest of the week in Cornwall passed in complete bliss, as far as Remus and Sirius were concerned. They spent long hot days on the beach and hillsides, wandering through quaint little villages, exploring caves and getting tipsy in pub gardens. They dined exclusively on pasties, fish and chips and ice cream, and at night - oh, the nights were best of all.

During the day, if the others were around, they would toss a ball back and forth across the sand, or Remus would consent to paddle in the sea a little - jeans rolled up and long sleeved shirt still firmly on. If it was just the two of them, then he might roll the sleeves up to his elbows, exposing old scars, and Sirius would become Padfoot and chase sticks or his own tail. And they often got to be alone, because everyone else seemed to want to keep sneaking off.

Lily and James were the worst - when they weren't bickering they were snogging; gratuitously, and at length.

"You're supposed to be prefects!" Mary yelled at them, after the third night, finding them practically horizontal in front of the campfire.

"Oh, as if I haven't caught you a hundred times on my rounds!" Lily laughed, getting up and straightening her clothes nonetheless. "*And you* , Black, so you can stop leering."

"What?" Sirius blinked, innocently.

He was carrying back the bowl of washing up from the shower block. Remus had been pretty amazed by that - Sirius had volunteered to do the dishes every night so far ("I quite like doing it, the muggle way," he had confided, secretively, "Mother used to make us do the house elf's work as a punishment sometimes, but I just found it relaxing, to be honest.")

"Don't draw *me* into your sordid escapades," Sirius was saying, prudishly, setting down the tub. "I've been a perfect gentleman all holiday."

"I'm not convinced you haven't been sneaking off with some muggle girl in the village." Marlene said. She was lying stretched out on a towel in her underwear, sunbathing. Her body was very long and very pale.

"How dare you," Sirius flicked her with the damp tea towel, making her yelp and crease up, "I've been tucked up in bed early every night, haven't I, Moony?"

Remus choked on the crackers he'd been nibbling on, and had to be slapped on the back by James a few times before he recovered. *You'll pay for that later, Black*, he glared at Sirius, eyes watering.

Once James had calmed down about the 'Lily Evans Event' (as Sirius was calling it, behind his back) enough to think straight, he'd been surprised that Sirius and Remus were now sharing a tent, and suspicious, for all the wrong reasons.

“You’re not going to start fighting again, you two? You know you only wind each other up in close proximity...”

“Right you are, Prong,” Sirius said, brightly, “You bunk in with Moony and I’ll share with Evans.”

That put an end to *that* line of questioning, but not to James’s sudden overprotectiveness of Remus. It was nice - certainly nothing to whinge about - but a bit uncomfortable. Remus had never had any kind of big brother figure - unless you counted Ste or Craig, who had taught him to steal and drink and throw a proper punch - but James now seemed determined to do his clumsy, kind-hearted best. Midway through the week, Remus was a little surprised that no one had so much as mentioned the confession he had made on the first night. Not that he wanted anyone to make a fuss, or say anything sly or backhanded, but... *still*. Nothing at all? He brought it up with Sirius in a quiet moment, and he’d laughed,

“Well if Prongs gave everyone else that bloody speech I’m not surprised.”

“Speech?”

“Yeah he pulled me aside and told me if I started treating you any differently he’d thump me. Probably didn’t say that to the girls - maybe Lily did them.” Sirius stretched out, doggishly, lying on his front.

They were lounging on the beach, alone, on a quiet stretch of sand which so far no one else had discovered. Sirius was in his swimming trunks and Remus was taking the opportunity to stare at him as much as he liked, and as brazenly as he liked. Every now and then he gathered a handful of silky yellow sand and poured it over Sirius’s skin, just to watch the grains slide like water over the muscles of his back.

“You’re having me on.” Remus said, lazily, not believing Sirius.

“Wish I was. I swear, it was so hard not to laugh in his face and just tell him everything.” He rolled over, brushing the sand away carelessly, “I’m going to have to go and wash off in a minute, if you keep doing that.”

“That’s the idea,” Remus smirked. Sirius in the sea was his new favourite thing to look at.

Remus still didn’t *really* believe him, until the very last day of the holiday. They were all trying to pack up the tents - which didn’t seem to want to fit back into the bags they’d arrived in - and Remus had ended up taking over, because Peter, Sirius and James didn’t seem to understand the concept of instructions. The girls had deconstructed their own camp in less than an hour, and it was getting a bit shameful.

“Right, that peg needs to come out first, and there’s a sort of top sheet we need to remove, otherwise everything gets tangled up...” Remus said, scratching his head. James and Sirius did this successfully and began folding up the brown canvas.

“What would we do without you, Moony,” James chuckled.

“Yeah,” Peter said from the ground, where he was collecting pegs, “Who’d have thought you’d be good at all this stuff.”

“Well, I have always been the sensible one,” Remus murmured, not really paying it any mind, skimming the next few steps in the leaflet. Then he realised it had gone quiet, and James was standing over Peter.

“What do you mean, ‘this stuff’?”

Peter looked up, confused, and rubbed his hands together,

“Y’know, outdoorsy stuff - blokey stuff. I didn’t mean--”

“Pete. A word.” James said, his voice weirdly hard and flat; channeling Euphemia Potter in a stern mood. He marched off, towards the beach, Peter following nervously behind, still wringing his hands.

“Blokey stuff.” Sirius muttered, though he looked anxious and pale too.

“What was that all about?!” Remus asked, going over to pick up the pegs Peter had put down.

Sirius shook his head, and didn’t speak again until Peter and James returned, Peter looking very shaken. Remus wished he could have said something, but he felt like he might only make the problem worse.

When it came time to say goodbye, nobody wanted to leave. Remus found himself staring glumly down at the four yellow squares of grass where their tents had been, while James and Lily clung to each other, saying their goodbyes.

“You going back to Essex, Remus?” Mary asked, cheerfully.

“Staying with the Potters for a bit.” Remus replied, trying to perk up.

“Lucky!” Mary said, “I’ve got to go back to Croydon - Marlene invited me to stay, but Mum says she doesn’t see enough of me as it is.”

“That’s nice,” Remus smiled, “It’s nice to be missed.”

Peter and Dorcas left first, heading up to the main road to find a secluded spot to hail the Knight Bus. Remus waved them off, and everything *seemed* fine, but that might just have been James’s presence. The girls apparated - once Lily finally let go of James, promising to visit before the summer was over, promising to write, making James promise to telephone. She hugged Remus, and then - perhaps just in a moment of blind happiness, Sirius too.

James, Remus and Sirius apparated back to the Potter’s with somewhat more success than the first time. Remus ended up in the back garden, somehow, Sirius somewhere in the village, but Mrs Potter was thrilled to see them all the same, and decided they all needed some *proper food*, at once.

“Should we get in touch with the home for you, Remus?” Mr Potter asked, casually over dinner, “You’re not pulling another vanishing act, are you? Can’t have the muggle police called again.”

“Oh - er, no, I... um...” Remus stammered over his boiled potatoes - what could he say, to stop them asking? What would buy a bit more time? Sirius kicked him underneath the table, and gave him a look. *Go on, Moony*, it said; *tell the truth*. Remus looked at Mr Potter, “Actually, now I’m seventeen, there isn’t a place for me at St Edmund’s.”

“Oh good,” Mrs Potter smiled benignly, “We’ve got you all summer then, wonderful!”

As easy as that.

“I told you,” Sirius whispered, as he slid into Remus’s bed, after midnight. “The Potters love taking

in strays.”

“Should you be here?” Remus whispered back, anxiously, “What about James?”

“Snoring his head off, I could hear him through the wall.”

Remus didn’t press it further - after all, he wanted Sirius there. It felt funny, lying alone in a big double bed after a week spent squished up in a tent. Having another body close by was comforting. Having Sirius’s body close by was even better.

“Well done for telling them.” Sirius said, quietly, holding Remus’s hand under the covers. He did that often, and only in bed, in the dark. Remus didn’t mind.

“Yeah, I’m just telling everyone everything, this week,” Remus laughed.

“Nothing wrong with asking for help, Moony. People *like* helping their friends.”

“I know.” Remus kissed the top of Sirius’s head - one of the many privileges now permitted to him. Sirius liked to sleep hidden under the covers, like a hibernating creature. It made him seem smaller than he was, and made Remus feel protective. Another thing that was ok to feel, now.

“Sirius?”

“Mm?”

“That thing Wormtail said, did it really upset you?”

He felt Sirius tense against him, and instantly wished he hadn’t brought it up. He tried to cover his tracks, “Just... you know Pete, he’s a bit of an idiot sometimes, but he’s just thick, not spiteful. He’ll get used to it. Get used to me. Next time he needs his homework done, it won’t matter.”

“I’ve heard stuff like that before, that’s all.” Sirius said, very low, so that Remus, who usually had perfect hearing - better than perfect - had to listen closely. “About being a man. You know the sort of thing.”

“From your mother?”

Sirius didn’t speak, but his head moved slightly and Remus took it for a nod.

We aren’t talking about mothers. Remus had to remind himself. He just squeezed Sirius’s hand, and said the only thing he could think of.

“Well then, you know it was all bollocks.”

* * *

Saturday 30th July 1977

James Potter was not as clever as Remus had given him credit for. They had been back from Cornwall for a fortnight. James had telephoned Lily from the phonebox at the end of the road exactly fourteen times. And exactly fourteen times, Remus had had to accompany James to the phonebox, put the coins in the slot, dial the number for him, *and* show him how to hang up, at the end.

The phonecalls lasted about an hour, usually, leaving Sirius and Remus to sit outside on the brick wall, smoking. Occasionally they walked up and down the high street, but mostly they just waited for James to finish.

“Bloody idiot.” Remus sighed, as he exited the booth the fourteenth time. “How hard is it to remember a few simple steps? He did muggle studies, don’t they explain this stuff?”

“Aww, he gets too excited to remember anything.” Sirius laughed, “Have some sympathy for the lovesick fool.”

“No. I will be joyless and miserable forever.” Remus grumbled, fumbling with his cigarette lighter.

“Oh good, I love it when you’re all dark and moody.”

“Fuck off.”

“Mm, oooh yeah, now call me a stupid prat, that really gets me going...” Sirius teased, cigarette between his teeth, embers glowing in his eyes. Remus shoved him so that he stumbled off the wall, laughing.

“You *are* being a stupid prat.”

“Only for you.” Sirius stubbed out his cigarette. There was a low, dark rumbling in the far distance, and Sirius’s whole face lit up. He grabbed Remus’s arm, “Look! here it comes, right on time!”

Remus rolled his eyes. Sirius had another reason to indulge James. Every evening, while they waited for the lovebirds to finish their phone call, a miraculous thing happened - in Sirius’s eyes, anyway. A motorbike drove through the village - probably some aging hippie on his way home from his boring commuter job, Remus thought, petulantly.

It was a Triumph Bonneville T120 (Remus hated that he knew this, but after they’d seen it the first time Sirius had dragged them to the newsagent’s to buy every motorcyclist magazine he could find, until they had identified the model), with a cherry red tank, every inch of chrome polished to a gleaming silver. Sirius was madly in love, Remus was madly jealous.

Once the bike had passed, Sirius gave a sigh of satisfaction, then climbed back onto the wall, and watched Remus for a while. He did that a lot, now. Remus had to learn not to mind too much; being scrutinised. Sirius cocked his head, “Is it the moon? Making you grumpy?”

“Probably.” Remus shrugged. “Usually makes me restless.”

“Yeah, I noticed, last night.” Sirius winked.

“Oh my god, shut *up*, obnoxious prick.”

Sirius grinned and poked out his sharp pink tongue.

Remus *was* nervous about the moon. It would be his first full moon not spent at either Hogwarts or St Edmund’s. (Though presumably there had been another full moon, once, long ago, with his mother.) Mr Potter had taken him aside, after it was agreed Remus would be staying for the rest of the summer, and explained their plan of action.

Not that it mattered much to Remus; a locked room was a locked room. This time it was the attic, and Moody had offered to stand guard outside, ensuring that the family would be safe. Mr and Mrs Potter (not to mention James and Sirius) had repeatedly reassured Remus that they weren’t concerned in the slightest, and that he oughtn’t to worry either. But of course he did, anyway.

Sirius wanted to go in with him - so did James, but James at least had enough common sense to realise it wouldn’t be possible. No one was going to get anything past Moody - who had a new,

creepy eye, electric blue and horribly enchanted.

“Tackled werewolves before,” he said, gruffly, as Remus was led up the ladder to the attic, “Always got a good result, minimal casualties.”

This did not make Remus feel better, but he wasn’t sure if it was supposed to.

It was a bad night. Maybe it was Moody’s presence. Maybe the wolf didn’t like heights. Maybe it could smell its usual playmates, Prongs and Padfoot, and felt lonely. Maybe the wolf just hated Remus, who knew. Either way, when he woke he found he’d ripped the room apart; torn at the blinds and scratched the floorboards. In the end, the wolf had chewed its own paws out of frustration.

Hands bleeding, the skin all grazed away, Remus lay in the dark, his heart pounding, waiting for the pain to subside, or for someone to come and help him; whichever came first.

Mrs Potter patched him up, and did a good job, but he still struggled to hold his wand for a few days, while the skin grew back. He couldn’t hold a broomhandle, either, so had to just watch while Peter, Sirius and James practiced, like old times.

Remus found other ways to occupy himself. He’d got hold of a copy of the telephone book and spent more time than was probably healthy looking up every ‘Jenkins’ in Bristol. There were lots of them, but no Hopes. *Hopeless*. It didn’t matter, he tried to tell himself. He’d got on all right for twelve years without her.

“Tell me a secret,” Sirius would whisper, late at night - every night, he came to Remus, “Tell me something no one knows.”

And Remus would tell him - because it made Sirius happy, and that was a very worthwhile pursuit - in fact, Remus was realising, making Sirius happy might be the only thing worth doing, for the rest of his life.

“I’m the one who told Philomena Pettigrew to go to America.”

“You never!”

“Yep, in the bathroom on Christmas eve.”

“Sly bastard. How’d you get girls falling all over each other to talk to you, eh? what’s your secret?”

“Maybe they trust me because they know I’m not trying to get off with them.”

“An intriguing thought. Tell me another secret.”

“Um... I don’t know, I’ve told you everything.” *Everything that wouldn’t hurt you*, he added, silently.

“You haven’t,” Sirius said, his lips now against Remus’s, as he crawled on top of him, hands sliding up under Remus’s night shirt. He flicked his tongue along Remus’s bottom lip, “I’m going to know everything about you, one day, I promise.”

Remus kissed him deeply, believing every word.

Summer 1977: Part 5

Chapter Summary

CW for homophobic language/attitudes and generally unpleasant 1970s crap.
The C-word is used once in this chapter, but not in a misogynistic context.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

1977 and we are going mad

It's 1977 and we've seen too many ads

1977 and we're gonna show them all

Apathy's a drag.

Monday 29th August 1977

Remus awoke from his second full moon slightly better off than his last, but unable to move. Moody had bound him to the bed (kept in the attic specifically for this purpose) using some kind of advanced magic. It didn't hurt, but it was pretty humiliating, having to lie there and wait to be released, without any clothes on. Sirius had been vehemently against the idea, but it didn't hurt, and it was better than the alternative. Remus didn't care how the wolf felt about it.

"Made a lot of noise," Moody said, as he released him, "But that's to be expected."

"What do the others do?" Remus asked, pulling on his jeans quickly, wishing Moody would leave, or at least turn his back, "The werewolves the ministry knows about?"

"Either deal with it at home like this - with an Auror checking in before and after - or report to the ministry holding cells. I'll get you a leaflet, if you want."

"No thanks."

Remus had the distinct impression that Moody did not approve of Remus's decision not to register himself.

Downstairs, in his normal bedroom, Mrs Potter had laid out a set of robes on the bed for him - not uniform robes, but normal, everyday ones. The sort that James and Sirius wore out of school. He hoped they were hand-me-downs; he didn't know how he'd ever repay them if they started buying him clothes.

"They're for going out in," James explained, when Remus asked about it, "Diagon Alley today!"

With the first day of school not far off, it had been agreed that the boys would stay in Diagon Alley for the last few days of the summer holiday. Mr and Mrs Potter would be leaving for a few weeks -

on business for Dumbledore, apparently, though they neither confirmed nor denied this. Even Moody could not argue with Remus going to Diagon Alley this time,

“Crawling with Aurors, these days - under cover, you wouldn’t even know it.”

“And I’m seventeen,” Remus said, curtly, “So I’m free to go where I please.”

“Quite,” Euphemia said, tiredly.

Their Hogwarts letters had arrived only a week ago, and to everyone’s surprise James had been named Head Boy, as evidenced by a brand new gold pin tucked inside his envelope.

“Bloody hell!” James gasped,

“What the fuck?!” Sirius frowned.

“Language!” Mrs Potter scolded them both.

She’d been very proud, of course, but James was only interested in telling Lily, and rushed to owl her at once - in less than half an hour, they learned that she had been made Head Girl.

“It’s fate!” James declared, “Destiny!”

They used Floo powder to get to The Leaky Cauldron, a homely, old fashioned wizard pub which doubled-up as a B&B, meeting place and general community centre, as far as Remus could tell. James had booked two twin rooms, and after being greeted by the odd looking, hunchbacked publican, the four marauders hauled their school trunks up the stairs to settle in. Remus was sharing with Peter, because neither Remus nor Sirius could come up with an excuse for sharing together. The rooms were adjoining, which was some small comfort, but not much.

Diagon Alley was not like Hogsmeade, as Remus had thought it might be; it was more packed in, bustling, noisy - the wizarding equivalent of cosmopolitan. The streets were busy with throngs of students, and every shop was packed to the rafters.

Gringotts was the first port of call for everyone, and Remus followed James and Sirius around the palatial bank, struck dumb by the complete alienness of everything. Remus had never even been in a muggle bank before, but nothing could have prepared him for Gringotts; goblins and secret passageways and mountains and mountains of gold. James and Sirius swanned about like VIP members - mind you, they probably were. The goblins grovelled at their feet, which Remus found hugely distasteful, but couldn’t really say anything about. He wished Lily was there, or Marlene and Mary - anyone a bit more down to earth.

Remus found he had been left just under four hundred galleons in the vault which had once belonged to Lyall Lupin. This sounded like an enormous amount to Remus - until he saw the pitying look on Sirius’s face. He quietly took out enough for his books and some new robes, as well as a bit of spending cash to convert to muggle money.

Remus was so shattered after the full moon and the floo powder and the bank, that once he’d withdrawn his money he had to go back to the room at the Leaky Cauldron to collapse. The others promised him they’d leave off shopping until the next day, and would spend the rest of their afternoon looking at brooms and quidditch supplies. Remus was too tired to care, and crashed out on his little single bed, dead to the world for at least fifteen hours. He didn’t even wake when the others came clattering in at midnight, smelling strongly of whisky, loudly shushing each other and giggling.

The next day, Lily arrived, and their school shopping began in earnest. She and Remus had similarly methodical minds when it came to completing tasks, and conferred privately on a plan of action, before ordering the other three boys about for the rest of the morning. Remus wished he could have more time in Flourish and Blotts, but as they had done books last (being the heaviest items on the list), James, Sirius and Peter were seriously flagging by this point, and on the verge of mutiny if they didn't get some ice cream.

So; back to The Leaky Cauldron to dump their goods and have some lunch, ("For god's sake, James, you can't have ice cream before you've had any real food, that's ridiculous!"), then to Florean Fortescue's, where Sirius tried to buy Remus a scoop of every single flavour ("C'mon, Moony, it's only fair, you've never tried them before; how will you know which is your favourite?!")

Once all of this had been completed, Remus found his energy almost completely depleted once again, and it was only two in the afternoon. He considered taking a quick nap, but it was their last night in London, and he had one thing he really needed to do before leaving.

It took a little while to get a quiet moment to himself, but in the gent's at Florean Fortescue's, Remus took the opportunity to pull out his pocket watch. He clicked it upen - the mechanism every bit as satisfying as it had been the first time he'd used it - and whispered, "Grant Chapman," at the compass half.

He expected the arrow to start pointing east, but much to his alarm, it began to spin uncontrollably around and around, faster and faster. The compass had not come with instructions, but Remus had a sinking feeling that something he'd known all along was finally being confirmed. Grant was not safe. Grant needed help.

* * *

I live off you!

And you live off me!

And the whole world lives off of everybody

See we gotta be exploited!

See we gotta be exploited!

By somebody by somebody by somebody...

Remus hurried back to the little table outside the parlour, where his four friends were sitting, making a lot of raucous noise over something Peter had just done with his milkshake.

"Alright, Moony," Sirius grinned as Remus hovered nearby, "This lot want to go and do some sightseeing stuff, but it sounds boring, want to bunk off down Carnaby street, finally?"

"Yeah, great!" Remus said, forcing a grin. He widened his eyes at Sirius, hoping he got the message. Thankfully, Sirius was very skilled at following secret signals, and came over at once,

"What's up?" He whispered, "You look a right state."

"I have to go and find Grant." Remus said, agitated. "Look!" He showed Sirius the compass' mad

spinning.

“Right now?” Sirius frowned, “But we were going to--”

“Now.” Remus said. “I can’t explain it, I just have to, *I know* I have to. Could you tell James and Peter something? I don’t know what - just if they ask.”

“What? No, I’m coming with you!”

“Sirius...”

“Remus.” Sirius mocked his stern tone and quirked an eyebrow.

Remus sighed. This was probably one of those things he was supposed to include Sirius in. He swallowed his temper and relented.

“Ok, fine.”

“Shall we just *tell* the others where we’re going?”

“No. Don’t argue with me on this.” He didn’t want anyone else knowing about Grant.

Sirius, apparently recognising that Remus would only go so far, nodded, and didn’t push his luck. They told the others they were going to Carnaby Street, to look at the shops, paid and hurried away, without looking back.

They had to go and change into muggle clothes first, and once they had left Diagon Alley they headed for Charing Cross station and caught two tubes to the squat in Mile End, which Remus thought was probably the best starting point. By the time they got there it was almost four in the afternoon.

Remus wasn’t sure if it was a year of neglect or just hindsight that made the rundown block of tenements look much less welcoming than they had last summer. The smell of damp was stronger, part of the linoleum seemed to have been ripped up, exposing dirty, cracked cream tile. It was a warm day, but it still felt cold inside. Adz, the man Remus had met the year before, was the only one of the original crowd still living there.

“Grant?” He scratched his head, looking dazed, “Yeah, I fink ‘e went out west, when it got too rough round ‘ere. ‘ammersmiff, maybe. Knocking this place down next week, I’m goin’ Brixton.”

“Hammersmith?!” Remus said, “That’s the other side of town!”

“Yeah ‘e made some friends out there I reckon. Grant’s always good at making *friends* , when it suits him.”

He said that a bit sharply, Remus didn’t like it, and automatically made himself taller, squaring his shoulders. Adz looked him up and down irritably and snapped, “Look, if ‘e don’t wanna be found, ‘e won’t be.”

So, back on the Central line, and across the city they went. As they passed Tottenham Court Road, Remus felt guilty for ruining Sirius’s day in muggle London, and secretly promised to make it up to him when he next had the chance. Still, Sirius was having a surprisingly good time; as enthralled by the escalators and ticket barriers as Remus had been by Gringotts.

They changed at Notting Hill, then walked, because Remus didn’t have a clue where he was going,

except for his nose, and the compass, which was spinning less erratically now, and seemed to be trying to lead in in a vague direction.

"It's amazing," Sirius said, staring up at the houses as they walked, peering into shop windows and stopping to watch double decker buses shunt past. "I've lived in London most of my life, and I've never seen it like *this*."

"Glad you're having fun," Remus said, distracted. They were in Shepherd's Bush now, he was pretty sure. It was past six in the evening, and he was slowing down. His hip hurt from rattling about on the underground; his shins were sore from the walking, and his back hurt because of Moody's awful binding spell.

"Let's sit down a minute, shall we?" Sirius asked, with a look of deep concern. "Look, there's a park over there."

It was Shepherd's Bush green - at least Remus knew where they were. He consented to rest only for a short while - he was mostly worried that once he'd sat down it would be impossible to get up again.

"Then I'll carry you." Sirius said.

"Piss off, will you." Remus snorted, resting his elbows on his knees and leaning forward. He pulled out the compass to check it once more. "Ugh, it's going mental again!" He groaned, "I thought I was getting somewhere..."

"It might be because you're agitated" Sirius suggested, delicately. "Er... you know, because it feeds off your emotion towards the person you're looking for. So maybe if you..."

"Are you telling me to calm down?" Remus frowned.

"It might help." Sirius replied, evenly. "How about you tell me something about Grant? Something nice?"

"If you think it will help..." They didn't have *time* for this, Grant needed him *right now* ... But at this point, Remus was willing to try anything. Even if it was just a ploy from Sirius to get more information. "Er... his name's Grant Chapman. I met him at St. Edmund's in 1975. He liked the same music as me, he's friendly, er..."

"What does he look like?"

"You've seen him."

"Not properly, I was a dog. Anyway, the point is to get you to think about him."

"I'm doing nothing but think about him." Remus snapped. He closed his eyes and breathed in.

"Fair hair. Curls. Er... I think blue eyes? Yeah, blue. He has a crooked front tooth. Last time I saw him he was thinner..." A swell of anxiety rose in his throat. "Er... " he stammered.

"Go on," Sirius encouraged, "You like the same music? So Bowie? T.Rex."

"Yeah, and he likes, um... Deep Purple."

"Cool, ok, so that's how you became friends?"

"Yeah," Remus nodded, feeling a bit better, focussing on the positive, "He was the only one at St

Eddy's that wasn't a complete maniac, or a criminal - I mean, he had a few charges, but not like... not serious. Then one day he er... well he just kissed me, and that's how I knew..." Remus glanced at Sirius quickly to check that it was ok to keep going. Sirius's smile had tightened a bit, but he nodded again. "He's been a good friend, apart from that," Remus explained, "He never makes me feel bad about myself. He never makes me feel odd, or different."

"He sounds like a really great mate." Sirius said, politely.

"Yeah. And he'd do anything for me. That's why I need to..." He looked down at the compass, and saw that now it was pointing west - a little shaky, but clear enough for Remus.

They got up and followed. It was past seven now, they hadn't eaten since lunch and the sun was beginning to set. Lily, James and Peter would no doubt be wondering where they were. Sirius didn't complain, just kept quiet and followed while Remus mumbled to himself, following the little golden arrow in his palm and sniffing the thick London air.

Shepherd's Bush wasn't much nicer than Mile End, and seemed to have a buzzing nightlife. Pubs and clubs were filling up around them with teens and young people from every subculture; disco kids in bright satin and sequins, grimy skinheads in suspenders and boots, old school rockers with shaggy hair and punks with studded jackets and faces full of metal. Finally, as they were coming up on Latimer Road, Remus stopped still.

"There." He said, pointing across the darkening street to a building with blacked out windows, and steps leading down into a basement. Loud music was pounding up onto the street - whoever the band was, they had little regard for their instruments, and even less for the audience's eardrums. "He's in there." Remus said, firmly. The compass confirmed this, pointing straight ahead.

The basement - looked a bit livelier than Remus was comfortable with. As well as the 'music', loud shouts and screams were blaring from inside, east end accents, teenage rage. Skinny, yellow-toothed punks stood outside in packs, green spikey hair and heavy bike chains. Remus felt horribly vulnerable in his worn out brown corduroys and oversized grandad shirt, but Sirius was even *more* out of place, with his long hippie hair and unmistakably well-bred posture.

"Should we go in?" Sirius asked, without a trace of nerves.

"Um." Remus said. He was about to suggest that he go alone, when fate intervened.

"Sling yer 'ook ya fucking nancy boy," the bouncer was yelling at a young man, who was staggering out onto the street, head bent, hands in pockets. He had a mess of dirty blond hair, and a scent that Remus would know anywhere on earth.

"Grant!" Remus bolted towards him, running across the road without even looking.

Grant didn't hear, and was making his way slowly down the street, hunched over. There was something wrong with the way he was walking; his gait twisted and skewed. He reeked of cheap gin, even standing meters away. The punks were leering at him, yelling vile obscenities to chase him off. Grant turned and sneered back, throwing up two fingers and warbling incoherently.

"Grant!" Remus said again, catching him up, beneath a yellow street light. Grant finally stopped and turned, squinting. The wall behind him had been spray painted with various disparate slogans:

'EAT THE RICH',

'BUZZ KIDS AND THE GIRL NEXT DOOR/DON'T WANNA PLAY IN YOUR COLD WAR',

‘FUCK NATIONAL SERVICE’.

“Jesus Christ. What are you doin’ here?” Grant lurched and wobbled, drunk, leaned against a wall and clutched side, as if something was hurting him there.

“Looking for you!” Remus walked up to him, trying to see his face, obscured by shadow.

“Right, obviously... bloody hell, how do you manage it every time?!” Grant shook his head.

He didn’t look good. He looked dreadful. He was thin; thinner than he should be, thinner than was really healthy. His hair was lank and looked like it hadn’t been washed in a while, and he had a patchwork of bruises down one side of his face, disappearing under his t-shirt, purple and ugly.

“What happened to you?”

“Fucking punk happened, didn’t it?” Grant laughed, a horrid choking sound, then staggered again and sat on the pavement. “Sorry mate, bit dizzy.” He retched a few times, but nothing came up, so he spat.

Remus squatted beside him, hands trembling.

“Who did this? Did it happen in there?!” He leaned over, trying to get a proper look at Grant’s poor battered face.

It was *definitely* Grant, but he was changed almost beyond recognition. Gone was the bright blue denim and cheeky grin Remus remembered. Replaced by torn black drainpipes, haunted sallow eyes, nasty looking piercings in his nose, eyebrow, lip that were definitely infected.

“Gerroff,” Grant swung out, wildly, drunkenly. He wouldn’t have *hit* Remus, and it wouldn’t have hurt if he had, but Sirius leapt forward in an instant,

“Oi, back off, mate,”

Grant blinked and looked up at Sirius, raising a hand up to shield his eyes from the brightness of the street lamps. He frowned, then sneered,

“And ‘oo the fuck are you!? Piss off will ya, I’m talkin’ to my mate.” He turned to Remus, “Fancy a pint?” And tried to haul himself back to his feet. Remus helped him, gripping him firmly under the elbow.

“I don’t think you need any more to drink... how about some dinner?”

A flash of sobriety returned to Grant’s features,

“Got cash?”

“Yes, of course,” Remus nodded, trying to guide him away from the horrible street they were on, “Come on, I’ll buy you dinner, what would you like?”

“Oh, y’know me, I’m *easy*,” Grant cackled, leaning heavily against him, but at least allowing himself to be led.

Sirius followed, looking very uncomfortable. Grant didn’t even notice until they’d reached a cafe, some way up the road. Sobering up a bit more by then, he was still leaning on Remus, and Remus could hear a strange hitch in his breath that told him Grant was in pain.

“In here?” Remus turned to Sirius, questioning. Sirius glanced at the illuminated window, the cheap plastic chairs inside, with a faint look of disdain, but shrugged,

“Probably the best we’ll find around here.”

“You again!” Grant grumbled, “Thought I told ya to naff off.”

“Grant,” Remus said, gently, “This is Sirius, my friend from school.”

Grant did a double take, narrowing his eyes (or eye, anyway, only one of them opened properly),

“Well fuck me.” He murmured, still swaying, “Proper stunner.”

Sirius looked embarrassed, so Remus herded Grant into the cafe to sit down, ordering three cups of tea and a pie and chips. Chicken and mushroom.

“I don’t want no trouble from you.” The burly man behind the counter said, as he set the mugs of greyish tea down. “I know your types.”

“Piss off ya dirty old man,” Grant slurred, “Bet you’d pay for it if you could.”

“What did I say?!”

“Look,” Remus stood up, quickly, “He’s sobering up, I’ll keep him quiet, I swear. I’ll paid up front, he’ll be ok once he’s eating...”

The large man looked at him appraisingly, his eyes flicking to Sirius, still seated, then Grant, then back to Remus,

“What are you, Christian Outreach?”

“Sort of.” Remus nodded, trying to look religious. Whatever religious looked like. Anyway, it satisfied the cafe owner, who lumbered back behind his counter, presumably to heat up their food.

“Cor,” Grant laughed into his tea, “You get posher by the bloody year, Remus me old mucker.”

“Just please stop trying to fight everyone for five minutes, will you?”

Grant blew a raspberry, then giggled.

When the food arrived, Grant tucked into it as if he hadn’t eaten in weeks. Remus hoped that wasn’t true, but judging by the state of his boney frame, things didn’t look good. The pie and chips were demolished in minutes, and Remus ordered a bakewell tart for afters, as well as some more tea.

“Where are you living?” He asked, hoping he sounded kind, and not accusatory. “What were you doing in that club?”

“Getting bladdered.” Grant murmured. He was calmer now he’d eaten, slower, and more pliant.

“Well, you’ve achieved that. The bruises...”

Grant looked up, suddenly, right at Remus. He was stone cold sober, his eyes sharp and wide, as if Remus’s face was a mirror and he was seeing himself for the first time. He touched his grubby fingers to the marred side of his cheek.

“Got into an altercation few days ago.” He said, “But fuck it, I’m off tomorrow, going down Brighton. Sick of bloody London. Sick of bloody miserable fucking London. Everyone wants to get at ya, do you over, any way they can. D’you know what I mean?”

“Yeah,” Remus breathed. He felt so helpless. He wanted to look to Sirius for reassurance, but it seemed somehow disrespectful to Grant.

“ow’s school, poshnob?” Grant asked, slurping his tea like a builder.

“Oh.. ok, you know. Fine. What’s in Brighton? Somewhere to live? A job? How are you getting there?”

“Got friends,” Grant shrugged, then winced. He’d broken a rib, Remus realised, and scolded himself for not having noticed earlier.

“Do you need to go to a hospital? How long have you been like this?”

“No hospitals,” Grant grumbled, curling up in his seat protectively, “They fink I’m a skag head. Probably look like one, do I?”

“I went to Mile End, I saw Adz.”

“That cunt. He can fuck right off ‘n all. Look, lend me a tenner will ya? I’m good for it, gimme your address an’ I’ll pay ya back.”

“Not if you’re just going to get drunk on it.”

“Oi, Mr high an’ mighty! I’ll ‘ave you know I *deserve* a good drink. I’ve ‘ad me heart broken. You remember what that’s like.”

He gave Sirius a less than subtle glare. Sirius, to his credit, did not react, but stared at the sugar bowl. Someone had put their cigarette out in it.

“I’m really sorry, Grant.” Remus said, sincerely, “Look... where are you sleeping at the moment?”

“Up the road,”

“Is it safe there?”

“Lost my key.”

Well, Remus thought to himself. At least there's a *lock*. He’d been halfway to deciding to smuggle Grant back to Diagon Alley and just facing the consequences when they got caught.

They ordered more tea and Grant ate some more. Once he’d finished, he had grown agreeably soft and sleepy; drunk on a full stomach. Sirius and Remus helped him back to his room, in an old Edwardian terrace which looked as though it had been abandoned for years. Still, inside was busy and homelier than the condemned Mile End building. A young woman peered out if the next room along, mousy, freckled face at odds with her gunge green Mohawk.

“Grant? *Gawd*, you pissed again? I told you vodka’s not a fucking painkiller, go to a bloody doctor!” She looked up at Remus, “Who’re you?”

“A friend, I’m just trying to make sure he's ok...”

“He’ll be fine, he gets like this.”

Sirius performed a silent unlocking charm on Grant's door and Remus half carried Grant inside, settling him as carefully as he could onto the single mattress on the floor. It was a small room, with one tiny round window. Unfurnished, there was a stack of magazines in one corner with a lamp perched on top, a rucksack stuffed with clothes, a mirror which was rusting around the edges, and what looked like a small washing station - a bar of soap, a toothbrush and empty bowl.

Grant curled up on the mattress and began to snore softly. Remus knelt beside him, frowning. The punk girl stood in the doorway, arms folded, looking Sirius up and down.

"He said he was going to Brighton tomorrow," Remus said to her, "Is that true?"

"If he got the money together for his train fare," she shrugged, "Said it got nicked, last week. He was seeing this really rough type. Treated him like shit, poor love."

"He'll have the money." Remus said, firmly. "Will you make sure he goes? It will be safe?"

"I'm not his keeper," she shrugged, backing out, "Got enough problems."

"Charming." Sirius said with a raised eyebrow as she vanished back into her room.

"Shut the door," Remus said, pulling out his wand. he wanted to fix as much as he could while Grant was still sleeping. He ran through his list of healing spells - he'd only done them on himself, so far, but nothing had gone *very* badly wrong...

"What the hell are you doing?!" Sirius came over, as Remus aimed his wand at Grant's chest.

"What about the Statute of Secrecy?!"

"Bugger that," Remus grunted, "I can't just leave him like this."

Sirius stepped back and watched as Remus did his best to heal Grant's ribs, then clear up the bruises and blackened eye. Afterwards he leaned back, mind racing. He turned to Sirius, "Right, I think I need to stay here tonight." He said, "I could leave him some money, but... I think it's better if I make sure he gets to Brighton tomorrow, if that's still what he wants to do, when he's sober."

"Right," Sirius nodded, "We've got to get to King's Cross, though..."

"Yeah, I'll be on time. I can just apparate from Victoria."

"Ok." Sirius nodded again. He sat down, leaning against the opposite wall. He took off his jacket and folded it underneath himself.

"What are you doing?" Remus asked, "You need to go back to Diagon Alley."

"No I don't." Sirius shrugged. "I can stay."

"But James..."

"Oh right, yeah, hang on..." Sirius reached into his pocket and pulled out the compact mirror. Remus gazed at it enviously. He wished he had one. He'd give it to Grant, and never lose him again. "Oi, Potter, you there? Prongs?" Sirius was speaking into the device, "Hiya... look, me and Moony are going to a gig here, we'll be in late... don't tell anyone, ok? See you tomorrow... yeah... yeah... no, I promise. Ok. Cheers." He snapped it closed and looked at Remus, "There, done."

"You didn't have to do that. If you're worried about leaving me here with him, I'm really just

making sure he's ok."

"And I'm making sure you're ok, Remus." Sirius replied coolly. "I'm not leaving you to spend all night alone in this place. C'mon, let's get comfortable. Plenty of floor to go around..."

Remus's guilt soared even higher then, as Sirius gave him a bright grin and extended an arm towards him. His last night before school, spent on the floor of some muggle halfway house, and he wasn't even complaining about it. Remus sat down too, and slouched down to settle under Sirius's arm. At least they were together now. Sirius kissed his head, and they both watched Grant, sleeping like a child.

"I'm sorry." Remus said, exhausted, "He's not... I don't want you to think he usually acts this way. He's obviously had a bad time."

"What happened to him?" Sirius asked, very quietly, "What happened to make him end up here, like this?"

"He got kicked out of St Edmund's, two years ago," Remus yawned, his eyes growing heavy. "Didn't have anywhere else to go... can't get a job because he didn't do his exams at school. And I'm guessing he hasn't got a proper address."

"Remus?"

"Mm?"

"This wouldn't happen to you, would it? Because you've got us."

"Yeah," he murmured sleepily, only half paying attention, "I've got you, Padfoot. Don't worry about me."

Chapter End Notes

Two songs in this chapter, both by X-ray Spex. The first one is from 'Paper Bag', the second is from 'I Live Off You'.

Seventh Year: Back to School

For a horrible moment just as he woke up, Remus forgot where he was. He took in the stuffy air, the faint whiff of rotten newspaper, body odour and urine. He took in the hard floor, which had exacerbated his various aches and pains overnight. Then he opened his eyes and saw Grant, lying on the mattress opposite, staring back at him. He looked a bit better.

“Morning.” Grant mouthed,

“Morning,” Remus replied, moving against Sirius, who was still fast asleep, head back against the wall. He peeled himself away carefully and whispered to Grant, “Don’t worry, he sleeps like the dead. I’ll wake him up in a bit.”

“I can’t remember much.” Grant whispered, lying on his side, head resting on a pillow which looked dirty and stained. “Sorry if I was a knob. I think I am a bit of a knob, these days.”

“You were fine,” Remus shook his head, “Just... sad, maybe.”

Grant looked stricken, so Remus moved to get up.

“Loo?” He asked.

“Downstairs. I’ll show you.” Grant pulled himself up, gingerly, then looked amazed, “Blimey,” he said, patting his side, “Must’ve just been a bruise, after all. Knew I didn’t need no doctor.”

Remus pursed his lips and followed Grant out. Downstairs was already alive with activity, despite the early hour. The house seemed to be a kind of commune, full of all kinds of different people. There was an outhouse in the back garden (more like a yard that had been turned into an allotment) and an outdoor shower, which Remus couldn’t imagine was much fun in the winter.

Still, the people were friendly and all said hello to the two boys as they passed - which Remus remarked upon.

“Everyone seems nice?”

“They’re all right,” Grant replied from inside the loo, “Only been ‘ere a few days. Leaving soon as I can.”

“For Brighton? You mentioned last night...”

“Oh, did I? Yeah, that *was* the plan...” Grant came out of the outhouse, looking sheepish, “Maybe next month, though.”

“What’s there? Friends?”

Grant nodded,

“Yeah - one of the nicer lads from the Mile End place. Got a cousin there too - the last Chapman who don’t hate me. She owns a pub, said she’d hire me if I could get my shit together and pay the train fare.” He sighed, heavily, washing his hands, then face in a bucket of water taken from a big green water butt standing by the back door. “S’posed to ‘prove myself’.”

“That doesn’t seem very...” What did Remus want to say? Familial? Kind? Grant had clearly experienced very little of either.

“Nah, she’s fair enough,” Grant replied, feeling in his pockets and coming up empty. Remus handed over his own tin of roll ups, and the lighter. Grant nodded appreciatively, and continued explaining as he lit up, “I’ve let ‘er down a few times before. Mostly if Grandad was involved - you know I can’t stick him.”

Remus nodded, trying to be understanding. Grant had a huge family - Irish Catholic, he’d said once - but relations between them was often fraught, particularly where his patriarchal grandfather was concerned.

“Don’t get me wrong,” Grant was saying, “I really was going, this time, I was... but it just turned out wrong again. A lot’s turned out wrong, to be honest.”

Remus wanted to hug him, but he looked so thin, so wiry and prickly, it made him afraid to.

“How much is it?” He asked, digging into his pockets, “I’ve got a bit of money, left by my dad, you can have the fare, I’ll take you to the station *today* .”

“Couldn’t do that,” Grant held up his hands.

“Not to keep, obviously,” Remus said quickly, “You’d owe me. Look, I’ve got one more year of school, then I’ll come and find you - and you’ll have been working in your cousin’s pub, right? So you can pay me back - how much? Tenner?”

“Four quid.” Grant sighed. “I had four quid last week too, but I... I lost it. I didn’t drink it, promise.”

“Four quid?! I can lend you that. That’s fine.”

“Are you serious?!” Grant stared at him, blinking.

“Of course,” Remus nodded, frowning slightly, “Why not? You’d do the same for me.”

“I...” Grant shook his head, then pressed the heel of his hand into one eye, as if overcome with emotion. “Thanks, Remus. You’re such a good mate.”

“You’d do the same for me,” Remus repeated.

It occurred to him for the first time that he and Grant were actually the same age. Grant had always been so knowing, so streetwise and protective, that Remus had considered him older; more mature. But he was only seventeen, and life had been as cruel to Grant as it had to Remus. Perhaps even more cruel, because after all, Remus knew in his heart he would never be homeless; he could never be alone while the marauders were there. He needed to learn to stop putting people on pedestals; stop expecting so much of everybody.

He stepped forward then, and hugged the other boy, minding not to burn himself on the cigarette.

“When’d you get so tall, anyway?” Grant laughed, muffled under Remus’s arm.

“Don’t,” Remus chuckled, pulling back, “Sirius teases me all the time.”

“Sirius.” Grant shook his head in amazement, “*Sirius* and *Remus* . Bloody hell. It is him? The posh lad what broke your heart?”

“Er... yeah. It’s ok now, though.”

“I ‘ope so, Remus mate.”

* * *

There was time for Grant to pack his meagre possessions, and for Sirius and Remus to take him for breakfast at a small cafe in Victoria station.

“You’re going to make me fat,” he said to Remus, as he scoffed down his second bacon butty.

“No chance,” Remus said, prodding him in the ribs.

Sirius had been quiet all morning - but then he never did function well on a poor night’s sleep. He looked only slightly ruffled, his hair a little less lustrous than usual, his eyes a bit foggy. Remus could tell that he was still fascinated by the sights and sounds of muggle London - only of course he couldn’t explain that to Grant.

Grant regarded Sirius with a similar wariness. He apologised for his behaviour the night before, and tried to explain that they’d caught him on a ‘bad night’. He seemed meeker in front of Sirius, less cheeky - perhaps perceiving him as a social superior, and therefore mildly dangerous. Remus well remembered how alien Potter and Black had been to him, once upon a time.

“You two got ya own train to catch, eh?” Grant said, eyes flicking to Sirius, then Remus, then back again.

“Yeah, but we’ve got time.” Remus said. “Here, I want to give you this...” he handed Grant a scrap of paper which had the Potter’s address on it, “It’s where I’m living when I’m not at school. Will you send me a letter when you’re settled? A postcard? Promise.”

“Yeah, ok,” Grant nodded, tucking it away, “Warning you, my handwriting’s shit an’ I can’t spell for toffee.”

“I don’t care about that. I just want to know where you are, next time. Do you need stamps? I should have bought stamps...”

“I can get stamps,” Grant touched his arm, “You’ve done enough. Honest.”

They hugged again on the platform. Grant shook Sirius’s hand, which was weird, but polite of him.

“I’ll come and visit, at Christmas maybe, or next summer,” Remus said.

“I bloody well believe you, too - can’t get rid of ya, can I?” Grant grinned. His first genuine smile so far - it made Remus feel somewhat easier. “Like magnets, you and me, eh? Always snap right back together.”

This hit Remus in such a way that he had to hug Grant again, until the other boy laughed and pushed him away, “All right, all right - I’ve got a train to catch, y’know...”

And of course, so did Remus and Sirius. As soon as Grant had disappeared through the train doors, they bolted towards the Gentlemen’s toilets to apparate to King’s Cross. Inside the cubicle Sirius finally spoke. He touched Remus’s arm, where Grant had only minutes before,

“You look exhausted. Let me do it, you can side-along.”

“Really?” Remus could have said that he was no more tired than Sirius, who had put up with just as much as he had - but that would have been a lie. He was too tired to argue, even.

“Really.” Sirius nodded, taking his arm.

“Thank you for staying with me. Thank you for helping him.”

“Don’t be silly.” Sirius gave him a small smile. “He obviously... he loves you.”

“He--” But Remus had no chance to finish his thought; he was spinning through space, noise and colour blurring as he and Sirius left Victoria and landed - fairly gracefully - just outside King’s Cross.

They had no choice but to run for the platform - and found James hanging out of the train door waving frantically,

“Fucking hell! Where have you two *been* ?!”

“Language!” Lily’s face poked out if the next window along, “You’re Head Boy now, you should be setting an example!”

“I *am* setting an example, telling these wankers off!” James retorted as Sirius and Remus clambered onto the train just as the guard’s whistle blew.

“Language!” Lily said again, “Honestly, James, you really need to start growing up this year, you’re of age, you need to start acting...”

“Isn’t she brilliant?!” James beamed at Remus, who was now sitting on the floor of the carriage, catching his breath. Sirius was bent over, hands on his knees, looking shockingly un-Sirius; red in the face, hair everywhere. James regarded them both, folding his arms, gold Head Boy and Quidditch Captain badges glinting on his dark robes. “So where were you?”

“Told you. Gig.” Sirius huffed.

“Which band?”

“You don’t know them. Muggle band.”

“Why didn’t you come back last night? Where did you *sleep* ?!”

Sirius flashed a nervous look at Remus, and Remus could see that he was on the verge of spilling everything. He stood up quickly,

“We didn’t sleep. It went on all night. We had breakfast then came straight here.”

Sirius stared at him in amazement before nodding along. James shook his head.

“Mental. And dangerous. Seriously, lads, don’t do that again.”

“Won’t.” Sirius murmured, looking at his feet.

Lily appeared in the corridor, hands on her hips, looking beautiful and terrifying.

“Potter.” She said, “We’ve got to lead the meeting.”

“Right you are!” James grinned, forgetting all about his two out of breath friends, following the redhead away towards the prefect’s carriage. “See you later, boys!” He called, absent mindedly.

“You’re a really good liar,” Sirius said to Remus. Maybe it was the lack of sleep, or the pain in his hip, but this statement rubbed Remus the wrong way.

“What’s that supposed to mean?!” He snapped.

“Nothing.” Sirius looked down again. “C’mon, let’s find Pete.”

Peter was sitting with Mary, Marlene and Dorcas in the carriage Lily had just exited. He looked a bit outnumbered, as the girls were swapping tips for fingernail strengthening charms.

“We thought you’d miss the train!” Marlene said, as Remus and Sirius entered.

“You know me, McKinnon,” Sirius gave his most charming grin, “Like to make an entrance.”

“And now you’re dragging poor Remus down with you,” Mary laughed, “Come and sit here, Lupin, I’ll protect you from that delinquent.” She budged up in her seat to make room by the window. Remus took the space gratefully.

“Where were you?” Peter asked, “You left me alone with Lily and James. I might as well have been a ghost.”

“Gig. Stayed out late. Didn’t sleep.” Sirius waved a hand, yawning. He sat opposite Remus, and folded his arms, leaning tiredly against the window.

The train began to move, and Remus closed his eyes - because he was exhausted, but also because that way he didn’t have to answer any more questions about where he’d been. The girls began to speak more quietly, and he eventually drifted to sleep.

When he woke up, they were already in Scotland, the dark rolling hills whooshing past, a smattering of rain hitting the windows.

Sirius was curled up on the seat opposite him, completely hidden under everyone else's cloaks. Remus could hear him breathing evenly; fast asleep.

Mary was just sliding the door open as Remus stretched, waving at her sleepily. She smiled and waved back but looked serious. Marlene frowned,

“What’s up?”

“I just saw Lily,” Mary whispered, “Something happened in the prefect carriage,” she glanced over at Sirius, still just a lump underneath the cloaks, and lowered her voice even further so that Remus and Marlene had to lean in, “James and Regulus got into a fight. They’re both ok, but it got quite nasty, by the sounds of it... Regulus was saying some really crazy stuff, Lily was really shaken.”

“He’s one of them,” Marlene whispered, looking anxious, “The Black family are you-know-who’s strongest supporters, everyone knows it.”

“Sh.” Remus said, quickly, “We don’t know what it was about. It could be anything.”

The girls fell quiet after that, but exchanged concerned looks with each other and Remus could tell they thought he was being naive.

He leaned back and looked out of the window for a while, listening to Sirius’s relaxed heartbeat and worrying about Grant and wishing more than anything that the worst was already behind them.

Seventh Year: Thunder

Neither Remus, nor Peter - who had also been in the carriage - said anything to Sirius about Mary's intel. Peter probably kept quiet because he wasn't sure how valuable the information was. Remus kept quiet because he was a coward, and if there had to be bad news, he'd prefer that James delivered it.

And sure enough, James appeared to meet them all on the train platform with a very red looking eye, and a rumpled school uniform.

"What happened to you?" Sirius yawned, oblivious.

"Tell you later." James murmured, before jogging over to join Lily in herding the first years in the right direction.

It was still raining lightly, and growing dark already - Remus was very glad not to be crossing the lake. Still, it was bittersweet, climbing into the horseless carriages one last time with Sirius, Mary and Marlene (Peter had decided to follow the honey and get in with Dorcas and her friends). As they pulled into the castle courtyard Remus looked up at the towering stone and wondered if this would be his final memory of arriving at Hogwarts. Perhaps they would all be back for a reunion party in ten years. That was a pleasant thought, though 1987 seemed completely impossible right then.

Remus tried to pay close attention to the sorting ceremony, the nervous line of tiny first years, the battered old hat, McGonagall's stern but caring countenance. He tried to imprint every moment in his memory - but it wasn't easy; there were so many distractions.

First, there was James's eye, which he still had not explained. Then there was Regulus, who was conspicuously absent. Snape, glowering as always, his eyes never leaving the back of Lily Evans' head. Christopher, who kept trying to catch Remus's eye, and Sirius, who was completely unaware of everything else, and simply thrilled to be back at Hogwarts; his true home. Remus was trying to enjoy Sirius's good mood without looking too much like he was staring. It was a real art.

Just as Dumbledore announced that dinner was served, the doors at the back of the hall flew open. All heads turned to see - except for Remus, who only needed to see the smile die on Sirius's face to know who it was.

Regulus did not hurry to his seat, as Remus probably would have, embarrassed to draw attention. No, Regulus was a Black through and through, and walked with his usual regal bearing, slowly and with purpose, head held high. There was no evidence that James had done any damage, but Remus thought that Reg was looking even paler than usual, and dark around the eyes as if he had lost a lot of sleep lately. The sixth year Slytherins made a big show of making room for him, as if he was a guest of honour, rather than their school mate. Even Snape's attention was momentarily diverted, as he leaned across to shake Regulus's hand.

All of this took up only a few moments, but it left an indelible mark on the Gryffindor seventh years, as they all eyed Sirius warily.

"Mate," James said, very quietly, "I need to tell you something, later. In private." He glanced up at Remus and Peter as he said this, so that they knew they were included in this.

Sirius just nodded, and kept his head down for the rest of the meal, only picking at his food.

Remus's heart ached, but there was nothing he could do. His sense of separation was inadvertently exacerbated by Lily and James, who kept squeezing each other's hands under the table. Remus didn't know when he and Sirius would next have the chance to be alone.

After dinner it was an almost unbearable wait for Lily and James to finish up with their new duties as Head Boy and Girl. Remus was nodding in his armchair, failing to focus on his Care of Magical Creatures NEWT text, eyelids growing heavier and heavier.

"Psst, Moony," James woke him, finally, with a gentle shake, "C'mon, we're all heading up."

Remus blinked, staring about himself in surprise - the common room was almost empty.

Upstairs in their bedroom, all of their trunks had arrived, their beds were made and pyjamas laid out. Rain was still battering the window panes, and Remus could smell a storm on its way - electricity and pressure making the air feel thick and too close.

Sirius was pacing, and though a window was open the room stank of cigarettes from his chain smoking. He had showered at some point, and his hair was still damp at the ends, dripping onto the maroon t-shirt he wore to bed. Peter was just coming out of the bathroom, already in his pyjamas and smelling faintly of toothpaste.

"You didn't wake me up." Remus said neutrally to Sirius. Sirius shrugged, carelessly, sitting down on his bed,

"You looked comfortable. Thought you could probably do with the rest." He turned to James. "Well?"

"It's about Regulus," James said, not beating about the bush.

"He give you that?" Sirius nodded at James's now very prominent black eye.

"Yeah." James nodded. He looked angry - a strange emotion on James. "Yeah, we had a few words in the prefect's carriage..."

"Words."

"Yeah," James's jaw was tight, and the back of his neck was flushed red. He flexed his fists, "Seems like Regulus and some of his mates have a problem with Evans being Head Girl."

"Oh no," Peter said, realising what had happened, "James, he didn't..."

"He was all talk." James said.

"But you weren't." Sirius said. He was still sitting on the bed, his shoulders slumped.

"Prongs!" Remus sighed, impatiently, "You didn't attack him first?! You know that's exactly what that lot *want* from our side. You should just have ignored him."

"He didn't make it very easy." James snapped, still wound up. "Anyway, don't bother, I've had all this from Lily."

Remus wondered what she had to say - he couldn't imagine that she would have taken very kindly to James playing the white knight. But then, Mary *had* said she'd been very shaken. "I didn't *hurt* him, anyway," James carried on. He had begun to pace the room, now that Sirius had stopped. "Just wanted to shut him up - I was going to use *silencio* , or maybe *scourgify* his mouth, you know

- but the little weasel dodged it and tried to get me back, so I used jelly-legs. That's when Mulciber swung for me, and Evans petrified all three of us. Just for a few minutes. Still, I got Regulus, so he had to go to the hospital wing and it all got written up."

"Are you in trouble?" Peter asked, chewing his fingernails.

"Nah," James waved a hand, "Loads of witnesses said Reg was asking for it, and in the end it was Gryffindor vs. Slytherin so McGonagall and Slughorn agreed to give us another chance to 'be civil'." He pulled a face at this.

"But Reg is ok?" Sirius asked, quietly.

"Yeah, fine." James nodded. He stopped moving and scratched his head, awkwardly, "There's something else, though..."

Sirius looked up. His arms were folded across his body, but not in a defiant way - more as if to protect himself.

"What?"

"Regulus, when Lily petrified him he fell, and we had to lift him up onto a seat. He'd rolled his sleeves up to duel, and when I was moving him, I saw... I saw... on his arm..."

"Prongs?" Sirius was staring at his friend with such a burning in his eyes that his pupils were twin flames - he looked desperate, as if willing James not to tell him.

"He's got the mark."

Peter made a noise, and sat down hard on his bed. Remus bit his lip, and stayed still, because he couldn't think of anything else to do that wouldn't look suspicious.

Sirius swallowed - Remus could see his adam's apple bob - then looked down, then back up at James. Now he looked defiant. He gave another shrug, which was probably meant to be casual, except he was still hugging himself, so it just looked petulant. He tossed his hair,

"Well then." He said, "S'pose we know how my family spent their summer, then. Fine. That's fine. He's picked his side. I've picked mine." He nodded, as if agreeing with himself. "Fine." He repeated.

"Padfoot," James reached out to his friend, "I'm angry with Reg, ok? I'm not... it's nothing to do with you, everybody knows you're not one of them."

"I know." Sirius said, almost violently. "It's fine." He squeezed his hands tighter over his arms and Remus felt dizzy with the urge to run over and wrap his own arms around him. "Is Evans ok?"

"Yeah, she's fine." James said, "I mean, I think she was hurt, but... well, she's tougher than me. Cooler under pressure."

"Want me to have a word? With Reg, I mean?"

"I'd leave it, mate," James shook his head. "McGonagall and Slughorn know everything now, you'll only make it worse."

"Everything?" Sirius looked up again. The rims of his eyes were red - but that might just be tiredness.

“Not everything,” James admitted, “Not about the mark, I wanted to leave that up to you...”

“...Ok.” Sirius looked down again. They were all quiet for a long time, before James tried again, heroically.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“No.” Sirius replied. “I just want to go to bed.”

“Yeah, good idea.” James said, running his fingers through his hair.

He was doing the usual James-thing - taking charge, assessing and managing the Sirius-thing - but the wind was obviously out of his sails. He wasn't sure what to do. Remus wished he could tell him, telepathically; he knew *exactly* the right thing. But it was a bad idea. No need to add his own nonsense to the pile. He would simply have to wait.

They all got ready for bed quietly, unpacking a few things, reclaiming their space on the bathroom counter, settling back into the comfortable and familiar room in which they had shared an entire childhood. Remus took a quick shower, to wash London off him, then brushed his teeth and dressed for bed.

When he opened the door again, he found the curtains drawn around all of the beds except his own. Light snoring was coming from Peter's, but James and Sirius were still awake. If Remus concentrated very hard, he could even sense how they were lying (James on his back, tossing his lucky golden snitch up and down, Sirius curled up on his side), and how relaxed they were (not at all). That felt like an invasion of privacy, though, so he just tried to creep as quietly as possible to his own four-poster, looking forward to a proper rest at last.

No such luck.

“Remus.” Sirius's head popped out from behind his curtains. Remus turned his head,

“Sirius.” He whispered back.

Sirius pulled back the curtain and - after a quick glance at the other beds - Remus climbed in as neatly as he could. Inside it was pitch dark, but he could still see Sirius's warm outline, kneeling before him. He twitched his wand.

“*Sonoro Quiescis*.”

“James isn't asleep yet,” Remus cautioned, “Are you sure you want me--”

“Yes,” Sirius replied, “Please stay, just for a little bit.” He reached out and grasped Remus's hand, squeezing it. Remus relented and finally put his arms around Sirius, pulling him closer. It was an immense relief.

“I'm so sorry about Reg.”

“He's not even of age!”

“I know.”

They pulled apart, and sat cross legged, facing each other. Sirius's head was bowed, his hair covering his face. He probably remembered how well Remus could see in the dark.

“I can't believe... I know it's stupid, I should have known all along that he would, but... I dunno, I

suppose I just hoped he'd..."

"It's not stupid," Remus said. "And we don't know he joined willingly. Remember what they did to you, when they wanted *you* to join him."

Sirius flinched, but didn't move away.

"Yeah." He murmured. "I doubt it got that far with Reg. He was always... he always wanted it more than me. The whole circus; our parent's approval, the respect you get from purebloods just for being a Black. We like to be popular, and powerful. It only makes sense. That's why we're all Slytherins."

"*You're* not a Slytherin."

"No, I'm not." Sirius exhaled, shakily, "I used to think..."

"What?"

"I used to think... maybe I didn't get sorted into Gryffindor because I'm brave, or chivalrous, like James is. Maybe I just wasn't welcome in Slytherin because I haven't got the ambition."

"Ambition?!" Remus stared at him, "Sirius, what Reg is doing, it isn't... it's not anything to be proud of. It's cowardly; he's doing exactly what he's been raised to do, without thinking, without *questioning*."

"Yeah, but..."

"And you're the bravest person I know."

"Moony..."

"Really." Remus said this with such seriousness that it stopped Sirius in his tracks.

"Thanks." Sirius smiled. He reached forward again, plucking the fabric of Remus's pyjama bottoms and sniffing slightly. "I thought that keeping quiet about you and me would be the hardest thing about this year," he said, "Forgot about the stupid war."

"Yeah." Remus wasn't sure how to respond. He wished he could forget about the war too. Sirius looked up at him, sensing his unease,

"It's still hard." He said, "Keeping this quiet," his fingers kept playing with the cuffs of Remus's trouser leg. "I feel like we're so far apart, when the others are around."

"We're pretty close right now," Remus offered, hoping to cheer him up a bit. It worked. Sirius took this as an invitation and finally met his eye, grinning. He leaned over and as their lips met Remus forced himself to forget about everything else, just for a little bit.

Afterwards, they found themselves crawling under the covers for warmth, sleepy and affectionate.

"I shouldn't get too comfortable," Remus yawned, "I'd better go back to my bed."

"Not yet," Sirius whispered, shyly.

"Ok." His eyes were very heavy, though. He was in real danger of falling asleep.

"Remus?"

“Mm.”

“Tell me a secret.” Sirius’s fingers curled around his.

“Um. I dunno.”

“Go on. Something good. Happy.”

“Er...” Perhaps now was the right time. He didn’t like to bring up the Black family, but after all, it wasn’t about Regulus or Walpurga. “I could tell you about something I did in my second year, if you won’t get angry...”

“What did you do?”

“Promise you won’t get angry. It’s a bit... well, remember I was thirteen, and I only wanted to help.”

“Merlin, Moony, just tell me!”

“Narcissa,” he said, “I um... I gave her the idea to use the unbreakable vow. You know, to get out of the engagement.”

The engagement, not your engagement, because that was still too painful.

Sirius was quiet. Remus bit his lip, and turned his head on the pillow to get a look at Sirius’s face. “I’m really sorry for interfering... But you gave me that reading spell, and you were so... I just thought you were so amazing and clever and brave, I wanted to do something to help you for once.”

“But you didn’t want to tell me about it?”

“I, er... no, I didn’t. At first I didn’t want to boast about it. Then so much time had passed, it just didn’t seem worth it.”

“Moony!” Sirius exhaled again - exasperated this time. “Honestly, you and your secrets!”

“I’m sorry!”

“Don’t be sorry,” Sirius chuckled, yawning again and shifting slightly to get comfortable, “I s’pose I did ask. And... that’s bloody impressive. I couldn’t have come up with that, at thirteen.”

“Well, you didn’t.” Remus smirked.

“So you actually went and talked to my cousin?”

“Yeah. She was terrifying.”

“Still is.” Sirius snorted. “They all bloody are.”

“Don’t think about it now,” Remus chastised him, “Or I’ll have to cheer you up again, and I can’t think of any more secrets tonight.”

“There are other ways...” Sirius replied, slyly. Remus laughed, hoping the silencing spell was still secure.

“Harlot.”

Seventh Year: Quill Shopping

Chapter Summary

CW homophobia/homophobic language and bullying.

Friday 9th September 1977

“Seven years. Seven years at this school. And I haven’t learnt *anything* .” Remus said, as he frantically looked for the right passage in his History books.

There were twelve of them open, currently, and he couldn’t remember which had the best counter argument for the 1382 Pixie Relocation Act. Seven of the books lay open on the desk in front of him, taking up almost all of the space. Five more hovered in mid air, at eye level so that he could check for references as he went.

“If you haven’t learnt anything, then what chance have the rest of us got?” Christopher smiled peacefully from his spot on the floor. He was sitting cross-legged, books on the carpet in front of him.

“I haven’t learnt anything useful.” Remus replied, impatiently, still searching.

“How are we defining useful?”

“Anything that will help me pass my NEWTs.”

“Oh, because you really buggered up your OWLs...” Christopher tutted sarcastically.

“NEWTs are completely different.” Remus countered, finally locating the passage he needed, now losing his quill. “*Nastily exhausting...*” He found his quill (behind his ear, embarrassingly enough), but now... “Shit.”

“What?” Christopher looked up.

“Lost my inkwell...”

“You ought to get one of those self-inking quills. We can look in Hogsmeade, next weekend if you fancy.”

“Yeah, why not...” Remus continued lifting books.

“Here, I’ve got a pencil if it’s just note taking...” Christopher crawled underneath the desk now to find his book bag. Remus felt a bit guilty then, for taking up all the space.

“Sorry.” He said, stepping back from the madness for a moment, “It’s fine. It’ll all be fine once we get the study group up and running again...”

“Talking to yourself, Moony?” James and Sirius appeared in quidditch robes (Sirius was still officially off the team, but nothing was stopping him from using the pitch on off days, and at least it kept him distracted.)

“Merlin’s wrinkly ballsack.” Sirius said, staring at Remus’s desk. “You can’t have this much homework after the first week?!”

“I’m reading around my subject.” Remus replied, irritable again.

“Here you are, Remus,” Christopher reappeared from under the table, brandishing a pencil.

“Cheers!” Remus took it and began to scribble away onto his parchment.

“Oh, hello Black,” Christopher nodded politely, ducking his head.

Remus glanced up, mid-scribble. Sirius was looking at Christopher with a bored kind of disdain.

“Hello.” He nodded. He looked at Remus, “Study group, is it?”

“No, just ordinary studying today,” Remus explained. “But I was just saying we ought to set up a meeting soon - if people still want to do it.”

“Of course they will!” Christopher said, eagerly, “You got half of us through our OWLs last year.”

“Yeah,” Sirius said, out of the blue. He looked thoughtful, which was dangerous. “Yeah, I might join this year. What’dyou think, Prongs?”

Jamus looked up from the sofa, where he was polishing his broom.

“Mate, I’m busy enough as it is! --Sorry, Remus.”

Remus shrugged. He looked at Sirius,

“You’d hate being in a study group.”

“Well I’ll never know unless I try, will I? And you’re always saying it’s such an important year.”

“Mm, I’ve been saying that for the past three years, actually…”

“And it’s finally sunk in!” Sirius grinned. That Sirius Black grin. Even with everything between them now, it was completely disarming. “Besides,” Sirius continued, looking at Christopher now, “I might be able to impart some of my wisdom.”

Remus didn’t argue it any further. He’d learnt his lesson - you couldn’t tell Sirius anything; just had to let him work it out for himself. And *yes*, he probably wanted to join the study group because Christopher was in it. But after all; *Sirius* had made the choice to keep the relationship quiet; *Sirius* was choosing to pretend that he really did want to do homework. Remus would just go along with it.

In the meantime, Remus felt as though he was limping through the first half of the term. He had not been so overwhelmed by his curriculum since his first year. Everything seemed ten times more involved than it had been the year before, and the essay requirements were at least ten inches longer. He felt suddenly very guilty about spending the entire summer relaxing and pleasing himself, when all the while time had been ticking away.

Even having dropped Potions, Astronomy and Herbology, there was still Arithmancy, History, Charms, Transfiguration, Defence Against the Dark Arts and Care of Magical Creatures; all of which seemed to have reached new heights of complexity as the final year got into full swing. Not to mention the extra lessons he was taking with Madam Pomfrey.

Not for the first time, Remus was extremely glad he was no longer a prefect, as he found himself spending almost all of his time squirrelled away in the bowels of the library, squinting over ancient texts with dust in his hair. He stayed through his free lessons, half of his lunch break, and more often than not was still there until Madam Pince chased him out.

In the end, he was thrilled to meet up with his study group again, just to have a bit of human company.

“There you are!” Christopher met him outside the Charms classroom after lessons on a Thursday. Professor Flitwick had been kind enough to hand over his classroom for another year.

(“I’ve no doubt you’ll have a classroom of your own, one day, young Lupin!” the tiny teacher had squeaked cheerily. Remus blushed and did not comment. One day his secret would be out; everyone would know why he was not fit to teach, or even be in a school at all, and then what?)

“Here I am,” Remus replied to Chris with a smile, “Were you looking for me?”

“Not particularly, just haven’t seen much of you for the past week. Not even in the common room.”

“I’ve been there reading for an hour a night,” Remus said, “...but only once the library is closed.” And before Sirius came down yawning at one o’clock telling him to go to bed.

“Admirable dedication,” Christopher nodded as they entered the room and began rearranging it to their liking. “But don’t go too hard, ok? Try to enjoy your last year a bit!”

“I enjoy studying,” Remus said, firmly, unpacking his books. This wasn’t exactly a lie, but he knew he sounded defensive.

The truth was; he knew he was working harder than he needed to, and for longer hours. But it was better than lying awake all night worrying about the various other problems that plagued him. He still hadn’t heard from Grant - though that could just be the vagaries of muggle post. He hadn’t given any proper thought to his mother yet, though he knew he really ought to. There had been three reports of werewolf attacks over the summer, and one arrest made. When it came down to it, NEWTs were the only thing Remus thought he could really cope with at the moment.

And he didn’t actually think anyone had really *missed* him, exactly - after all, they were very busy too. Lily and James had a whole host of new responsibilities, on top of their NEWTs. Lily was taking Advanced Potions, James had quidditch. Peter and Dorcas were on-again-off-again, but it seemed to keep him pretty occupied, and Marlene was working harder than ever this year in the lead up to her healer academy entrance exams. Mary, of course, had a new boyfriend, which kept her busy.

“You need a break,” Christopher was saying, taking his own seat next to Remus, like his second in command. “That’s all I’m saying.”

“Ok,” Remus nodded, as if he was really taking it in.

It was alright for Christopher; he was a pureblood. Even if he didn’t work as hard as he did, there was probably a cushy ministry job waiting for him once he finished school. If Remus worked every hour of the day, and got an O in every NEWT, he still didn’t see much of a future beyond part time work and depending on his friends for help. That’s if Greyback didn’t get him first, or if the ministry didn’t lock him up.

The other students began arriving, so they could stop talking about it. It was a smaller group than

last year, but still a good round dozen. You couldn't expect everyone to show up for the first week. Sirius did come, much to Remus's surprise, and the girls' delight.

"Sit here, Sirius!" Martha Eriksson, a fifth year Hufflepuff, waved at him.

Sirius smiled politely and acquiesced, placing himself directly opposite Remus in the horseshoe of desks. Remus nodded at him, and tried not to hold eye contact for too long before gently clearing his throat and addressing the room.

"Hi everyone," he smiled, looking about, "Nice to see you all back. Er. Shall we start by picking a subject? Anyone struggling with anything?"

The fifth years were all having a bad time with Astronomy, and Christopher volunteered to walk them through Eudoxus's theories on planetary movements. Three of the sixth years were stuck on a History essay, and the second years wanted help with Transfiguration.

"Ok," Remus said to the sixth years, "If you lot can wait a bit, I'll just get these two going on the Transfiguration stuff first..."

"I can do that," Sirius said, suddenly.

"Really?" Remus blinked, raising a skeptical eyebrow.

"Really." Sirius replied, coolly, "I'm better at Transfiguration than you, anyway."

"Oh, ok then..."

The two second years looked very pleased to have Sirius Black, whose reputation as school rebel and general heartthrob preceded him, paying them attention, though Martha Eriksson looked a bit peeved.

The session, booked in for two hours, went very well, in Remus's opinion. He tried not to hover over Sirius too much, though there was a lot of laughter and noise coming from that corner of the room. By the end everyone seemed to have achieved whatever they had wanted to achieve, and Sirius even stayed behind to help tidy the room.

"Will you be ok here?" Christopher asked Remus, "I'm supposed to be patrolling with Lily."

"We'll be fine." Sirius said, with what he probably thought was a very sweet smile, but was bordering on mania.

"Ok good." Christopher gave him a haughty glance, before returning to Remus, "See you Saturday for stationery shopping?"

"Great, yeah, meet you in the common room after breakfast." Remus nodded, helping Sirius push a desk back into place.

"See you!"

As soon as the door closed, Sirius stopped what he was doing and placed his hands on his hips, scowling.

"You're going to Hogsmeade with him?!"

"I said I would." Remus frowned, taken aback, "I need a new quill. What's the problem? I can meet you lot after we shop for quills, can't I?"

“But I thought you and me would... I’ve hardly seen you this week.”

“We wouldn’t be alone, James and Peter would be there. It’s not like I’m taking anything away from you.”

“Lily and James will be off by themselves. And Peter and Dorcas, probably.” Sirius was in real danger of pouting, now. Remus knew he ought to try and avoid a sulk, if he could.

“You can join me and Christopher, if you want.” He said. Sirius grimaced.

“Stationery shopping.”

“You need quills too. The only reason I keep running out is because you pinch all of mine.”

“But Moony...”

“You’re not jealous, are you?”

“Of course not.” Sirius shook his head, and returned to the desks, using his wand to return everything to order. He sighed, heavily, “I’ll come stationery shopping, then.”

Remus felt a pang of guilt.

“I’ll see if I can get rid of Chris after. Or we could find the others and go for a drink?”

“I’m *not* going to Madam Puddifoot’s.” Sirius said darkly, a hint of humour returning to his face. Remus smiled and slapped him on the shoulder,

“Good. Or I’d have to stop fancying you.”

“As if you could.” Sirius took his wrist and pulled him closer, kissing him hard on the lips.

Oh, Remus thought, *we haven’t done this in a while*. He felt really guilty, then. Perhaps Sirius was right - he’d been so wrapped up in everything else he’d neglected the one thing that might have made it all a bit more bearable.

They pulled apart and Sirius glanced at the door, licking his lips.

“Do you have to run off to the library or somewhere?”

Remus shook his head. Sirius grinned. “Good. *Colloportus*.”

The lock in the door clicked shut.

* * *

Saturday 17th September 1977

“Have you charmed your bloody curtains shut, you lunatic?!” James voice woke Remus and Sirius the Saturday of the Hogsmeade trip.

Remus sat up bolt upright, eyes wide. He stared at the curtains, which shook as James attempted to get in. Sirius took a more casual approach, rolling over slowly and groaning,

“Bugger off, Potter.”

“You’ll miss breakfast!”

“Be down in a bit.”

“Hogsmeade today, remember! Common room at ten o’clock sharp.”

“Piss *off*, Prongs!”

“Charming.” James muttered, but the curtains stopped shaking, and in a few moments his footsteps could be heard receding, disappearing down the stairs.

Remus exhaled. He pressed a hand to his chest, feeling his heart thudding hard, and willed it to calm down.

“Christ.” He breathed.

“Bit jumpy there, Moony?” Sirius grinned, rolling onto his back and stretching his arms over his head.

“I really need to stop falling asleep here.”

“You’re fine. The charm held, didn’t it?”

“You and James have boundary issues.” Remus pulled back the heavy bedclothes.

“Probably. Hey, don’t go!” Sirius reached out for his arm.

“Breakfast!” Remus insisted, fishing about for his underwear.

They washed, dressed and hurried down to the Great Hall, just in time for the last few scraps of toast and a few dollops of porridge.

“I expect it of Black, but it’s not like you to miss a meal, Remus,” Lily commented, skimming her copy of *The Daily Prophet*.

“I was up late reading.” Remus said. “I can have a lie in on a Saturday, if I want...”

“Wasn’t saying you couldn’t.” She tutted, as if he was being over-sensitive. She lowered the paper, “I was patrolling with Christopher Barley yesterday evening. He mentioned you were going to Hogsmeade together today...”

“Mmph?” Remus looked up at her gormlessly, mouth full of toast and honey.

What fresh hell? Everyone was looking at him, suddenly, with varying degrees of amused curiosity. He swallowed. “Yeah. Just to Scrivenshaft’s, I need a new quill.”

“Get on quite well, don’t you?” Lily asked, innocently.

“We do the study group together...”

“Did *he* ask *you*, Remus?” Mary joined in.

“What’s that got to do with anything?”

“Oh, c’mon,” she grinned, “Chris is definitely... *you* know; ‘that way’. He’s so camp.”

“Is he?” Remus asked, uncomfortably. “I hadn’t noticed. We’re just buying quills, nothing else.”

“But if he fancies you--”

“Merlin, leave him alone, will you?!” Sirius said, hotly, glaring at both girls, “Just because Christopher is... whatever, doesn’t mean Moony automatically has to go out with him. He’s not *that* desperate.”

“Oi,” Remus said, relieved by the interruption, “Who says I’m desperate at all?!”

“Exactly.” Sirius nodded, “See? He’s not interested.”

“Oh, but Chris is really nice,” Lily said, “I thought you’d make a good couple. Similar interests and whatnot.”

“Maybe Moony doesn’t *want* to go out with someone similar.” Sirius interjected, setting down his coffee mug a bit harder than necessary.

Remus surreptitiously put a hand on his knee under the table, hoping to quiet him. Sirius glanced at him, then looked down at his plate. Thankfully, he got the message.

“You can’t let stuff like that bother you.” Remus whispered on the way back to the common room, as soon as the others were out of earshot.

“It should bother *you* .” Sirius replied, still wound up.

“Yeah, but you need to learn to be more subtle if we’re going to--”

“Oh, we’re back to *this* again.” Sirius sighed, heavily, “I’m sorry I’m not as good at all this undercover bullshit as you are.”

“What?!” Remus stared at him. Sirius shoved his hands in his pockets and muttered,

“Nothing.” He sped up, catching up with James and leaving Remus to walk by himself.

“Everything ok?” Lily slowed down, as James and Sirius began chattering animatedly ahead of them.

“Fine.” Remus replied.

He was in a mood now. Who did Sirius think he was, complaining about how difficult it was to keep secrets, when it was all his idea to keep the relationship quiet in the first place?! He ought to just go off with Chris and ignore Sirius for the rest of the day - that would serve him right.

“What did he say?” Lily was asking.

“Hm?”

“Sirius,” Lily nodded ahead at the two black haired boys in front, “Is he being a prat? Because I will give James permission to box his ears, if he’s acting weird about you being...”

“Oh, no, nothing like that,” Remus waved a hand and forced on a smile, “It was something else. Stupid stuff, don’t worry.”

Christopher was waiting in the common room, a shy smile on his face. Remus smiled back, bounding over to him. “Ready?” He asked, brightly.

“Yeah,” Chris nodded, excited, “I’ve got a list of books I wanted to look for, too - if that’s ok with you? I mean, if you have time, before you have to meet your friends...”

“You’re my friend too, Chris.” Remus said, hoping Sirius overheard.

It was a nice day out, sunny for late September, with only a very faint chill in the air, meaning that by the time the students had trekked down to the village most of them were warm enough to have removed their heavy cloaks. Remus kept his on, because he rarely took off any layers, but Chris shrugged his off once they reached the first row of shops,

“Ooooh, look at him!” A sharp wolf-whistle sounded behind them. They both spun around to see Barty Crouch and Regulus Black not far away, both snickering meanly.

“Ignore them.” Chris muttered to Remus, “They’re in my Potions class, they’re dickheads.”

“Come on,” Remus said, “Let’s see your list...”

They passed a pleasant couple of hours together untroubled by anyone. Remus bought one of the fancy self-inking quills, as well as an ordinary one as a backup. They went to the book shop next and Christopher bought so much that he had to perform a weightlessness charm on the bag just to carry it all back.

“My trunk’s nearly full already,” he laughed, “What with all of the muggle books I brought with me. Have you read *Other Voices, Other Rooms* ?”

“No, I didn’t do much reading this summer...”

Everything was going pretty well, until they decided to head for the Three Broomsticks as a final stop. Remus was feeling almost like forgiving Sirius, by now, having calmed down, though he was a bit apprehensive about seeing the others with Christopher.

“Lily said you’d told her about us coming to Hogsmeade...” he said, casually. Christopher furrowed his brow,

“Yeah, I think it just came up in conversation.”

“You know she’s one of my best friends,” Remus said, hoping he didn’t sound too much like he was accusing Chris of anything, “So... she knows I’m queer...”

“Mm, she knows I am too.” Christopher said. “Or I assume she does. Most people figured it out before me, I think. Lily’s a really nice girl, though.”

“Yeah, right,” Remus nodded. “Thing is, I think she thought this was... um... y’know, like we were coming to Hogsmeade *together* . So... just, if we see my friends, they might act a bit funny.”

“Oh,” Chris said, looking confused, “Er... ok? Would you rather we didn’t go to the pub, in case they’re there?”

“No!” Remus said, quickly - he knew he was making a pig’s ear of explaining himself, “I just meant--”

“Here they come!” That mean voice interrupted them again. They’d just turned a corner, and found their path blocked by the two sixth year Slytherins.

“Oh, get lost, will you?” Remus sighed, impatiently. “Go and find someone else to annoy.”

“Watch out, Loony Lupin,” Regulus cackled, “ *Chrissy boy* there is a knob-gobbler!”

Chris turned bright red and looked at his feet. In a fit of rage, Remus withdrew his wand and

adopted a duelling stance.

“Piss off, Black!” He shouted, “Or I’ll tell mummy you still play quidditch!”

Regulus scowled, and pulled out his own wand.

“Yeah,” another voice added, “And *I’ll* tell all your creepy mates how you wet the bed until you were ten!” Sirius appeared at Remus’s shoulder. Remus laughed.

“Is that true?”

“Yup.”

“Shut up!” Regulus burst out, angrily. He didn’t go red when he was embarrassed, but turn a shade paler. “*Flagrante!*”

“*Protego !*” Sirius yelled, deflecting the curse just in time.

“Just you wait!” Regulus growled, backing away.

“What’re you gonna do, give me detention?” Sirius laughed, “I’m quaking in my boots. Run along, little brother.”

Regulus clenched his fists.

“You’re no brother of mine!” He spat, as he turned and stalked away, Barty following him, looking annoyed that he hadn’t had his own fun.

“Suits me.” Sirius said, quietly, under his breath. He turned to Remus and Chris, “Three Broomsticks?”

Seventh Year: The Mastermind

It couldn't have been a coincidence that Sirius had shown up at exactly the right moment, but Remus was so relieved at the time that he didn't bring it up. Sirius was being so friendly towards Chris, and Remus didn't want to start any kind of argument. Whatever had been up that morning had clearly been a fluke; everything was fine, everyone was happy.

"I can't believe he's still allowed to be a prefect," Lily said, fiercely, when she heard what had happened with Regulus. "He's been worse than ever this year - and don't get me started on the Crouch kid, he gives me the creeps." She shuddered visibly, and James put a gallant arm around her shoulders.

Christopher shrugged, nervously,

"It's fine, I can handle those two idiots."

They hadn't mentioned what Regulus had actually said during their retelling, at Chris's request. Still, he looked a bit overwhelmed, sitting with all four marauders and the Head Girl in The Three Broomsticks. Christopher's own social circle was quite small, and generally much quieter.

"Ought to teach them a lesson," Sirius said, signalling to Rosmerta for another round of butterbeer.

"Another one," Remus sighed, under his breath.

"What sort of thing were you thinking, Pads?" James leaned over, excited.

"I'd need to think *very* hard," Sirius said, stroking his chin thoughtfully, like an old professor.

"We haven't done a prank in ages," Peter put in, eyes gleaming, "Not since... er..."

"The Bubotuber-puffballs," Remus provided, sipping his drink.

"It's best if you just cover your ears, Christopher," Lily advised wryly, "There's no stopping them once they're in planning-mode."

Remus poked out his tongue at her. It was true enough; he was already starting to get those familiar butterflies in his stomach that he always did when the marauders embarked on a new mission.

"You wouldn't hurt anyone... would you?" Chris looked anxiously at Sirius and James, who were doing their telepathic communication thing, grinning at each other like loons and waggling their eyebrows.

"What are you looking at us for?!" Sirius winked, "*Moony's* the dangerous one."

"How dare you," Remus replied, smirking, "Everyone knows that you three lead me astray. Anyway, it's seventh year, and we've done everything there is to do."

"Have some imagination!" James said, "I can't believe I'm hearing this from the boy who once *literally changed time* just for a laugh."

"That was you?!" Chris yelped, looking affronted. Remus tutted,

"I did not 'literally' do anything. We mucked about with the clocks."

“When you were eleven,” Sirius said, “You single-handedly organised and implemented a full scale itching powder attack on the Slytherin boys.”

“Rosehip seeds.” Remus corrected.

“And!” Peter added, bouncing excitedly, “You were the one who perfected the soap expansion spell when we blew up all the toilets in second year.”

“Ok, yeah, I helped with that... it was a team effort!”

“Remus, wasn’t it *you* who invented that word-swapping spell to stop the Slytherins using insults?” Lily asked, smiling sweetly at him, tongue between her teeth.

“Oh, I liked that one!” Chris cheered up a bit.

“I didn’t *invent* it.” Remus said, “I just... er... did the research.”

“See.” James said to Christopher. “Moony is our criminal mastermind. Without him, we wouldn’t be the legends we are today.”

Christopher stared at Remus, evidently seeing him in a completely new light. Remus sighed, heavily.

“I hate you all.”

“Does that mean you’ll help us with another prank?”

“...Yes.”

“I’ll help too!” Chris said, suddenly, looking happier than he had in hours.

“Oh for goodness’ sake.” Lily groaned. “I suppose *someone* had better monitor you lot, if only for health and safety... I’m in.”

“Excellent.” James beamed.

Remus smiled back at them all, trying to ignore the feeling of anxiety growing in his chest.

* * *

Monday 3rd October 1977

Dear Remus,

Sorry I did not write sooner I have been very busy. Sorry too for my bad writing. I am at my aunt Val’s pub in Hove and its very nice. Shes letting me work here and stay in her spare room but I will move out on my own when I have some mony saved. I hope you will come to see me when you can. You can ring me on the number at the bottom if you like.

I hope school is ok. I hope Syri Sirus Siry your friend with the long hair is taking care of you as well as you took care of me.

Lots of love from Grant Chapman.

P.S. Did you here that Marc Bolan died? It was a car crash. I thought of you when I herd and I hoped you was not too sad.

Remus held the letter, written on a bit of narrow ruled paper torn from an exercise book, and sighed with relief. He folded it neatly and slipped it in his pocket, grinning to himself. Grant was safe. Grant was *safe* .

“Who was that from?” James asked, catching Remus’s smile.

“A friend from St Edmund’s,” Remus replied easily. Sirius looked up, and Remus gave a very slight nod. Sirius smiled too. Remus cleared his throat and returned to his breakfast, “Marc Bolan died.”

“Oh no!” Mary, Lily and Sirius said in unison.

“Who’s--” James started,

“The singer from T.Rex.”

“Oh yeah! Wasn’t that the muggle band you two were obsessed with in first year?”

Mary tutted, rolling her eyes,

“Bloody purebloods.”

“Oi.” Sirius said, nudging her with his elbow. “That’s really crap news, though. Hey, *I* know what we should d--”

“No.” Lily said, suddenly, “I know that look, Black!”

“What?” He painted on his most innocent expression. Lily was not fooled.

“ *No* parties.”

“Oh come *on* , Evans, it’s for--”

“I’ll tell you what I told James.” She shook her head, “Birthdays are fine, but not during exams, and not this early in the year!”

“Prongs?!” Sirius glared at his friend. James looked awkward,

“Sorry, mate, I did agree to that... y’know Head Boy and everything...”

“Betrayal!” Sirius pointed at him dramatically, “Treachery! Treason!”

“All right, calm it down...” Lily stood up. “I’m letting you have your birthday, aren’t I? Leave James alone.”

“You off?” James looked up at her.

“Potions.” She replied, “I want to get there early to ask Slughorn something.”

“I’ll walk you.” James stood up too, eagerly. Sirius frowned, but James was oblivious. He took Lily’s hand, and without looking away from her, “See you in a bit, Pads? And see you at lunch, Moony...”

“See ya,” Remus nodded, reaching for some more toast.

Sirius stared after the couple as they left the hall, heads bent close as they chatted happily.

“Can you believe that?”

“What?” Remus buttered his toast and mused on the merits of honey versus jam.

“Prongs not wanting a party!”

“Well, it is quite early in the year...”

“This time last year he’d have been all for it. It’s her.”

“Oh dear,” Mary laughed, “I know what’s wrong with you, Mr Black.”

“There’s nothing wrong with me, I’m the same as I ever was, it’s--”

“Exactly!” She arched her eyebrow at him, “You *never* change. You’re jealous.”

“Pfft.” Sirius folded his arms and slouched down in his seat. His legs stretched out under the table and bumped against Remus’s. “As if I would be jealous of *him* .”

“Not of *James* ,” Mary rolled her eyes, “You’re jealous of Lily. She’s taken your best friend away and now you’re feeling neglected, right?”

Sirius went very quiet. He looked down, then back up at Mary.

“*No* .” He said, very fiercely, getting up. “I’m going to Potions.” He muttered, stalking off, away from the breakfast table. Mary sighed deeply, in that that girls did when they thought boys were being particularly dense.

“Honestly.” She tutted. “You agree with me, don’t you, Remus?”

Remus shrugged. He just wanted to eat his breakfast in peace. Mary tutted at him, too. “*Boys* .” She said, exasperated, “Emotional cripples, the lot of you. Right, I’ve got a free this morning, going to the library. You?”

“Yeah, but I had something else I wanted to do.”

“Suit yourself,” she smiled, getting up and leaving too.

Finally alone, Remus’s mind began to work, the beginnings of an idea forming. He didn’t disagree with Lily exactly - the parties were a massive distraction, and not really fair on everyone else. But at the same time, he hated seeing Sirius’s excitement quashed; particularly by James, who had always been a wholly positive force in his life.

He couldn’t help but feel that he, Remus, ought to be able to do something to cheer Sirius up. After all, he’d done madder things before. But what to do...

To distract himself, he re-read Grant’s letter as he finished eating, then wrote a quick response.

Dear Grant,

Thanks for your letter. I’m so glad everything is going well with your aunt.

I would love to come and see you at Christmas, if not then, over the summer maybe. I will try to call as soon as I am able to - hopefully the first weekend in November.

Crap news about Bolan! Thanks for telling me, we get no news here.

Speak soon,

Remus

He'd send it to the Potters first thing. It hadn't solved the Sirius problem, though. Remus had such a strong sense that he needed to do *something* - a gesture. Not romantic exactly, but... dramatic. He wanted to do something by himself, something that would make Sirius proud of him. This wasn't a secret, Remus told himself; not in the usual sense. It was a surprise. A present. But *what* ?!

Just as Remus was getting up to leave the hall, Emmeline Vance wafted past in a haze of sweet perfume and blonde hair. Something clicked in Remus's brain and he jogged to catch her up,

"Hey! Hey, Emmeline! Can I ask you a favour...?"

* * *

Friday 7th October 1977

It had taken all week between lessons and homework, but Remus had finally cracked it in time for Friday morning. It was a bit mad - which was why he hadn't told anyone about it. They might think it was a bit strange, going so far over the top just to cheer Sirius up. But it just seemed so worthwhile at the time; making Sirius happy.

Emmeline's instructions had been relatively clear, but Remus had made some of his own tweaks for good measure. He had paid her off with the last of his tobacco and sworn her to secrecy, though she'd said she wouldn't tell anyway because she liked the idea so much - she loved Marc Bolan too. The next few days he spent doing preliminary work in the library, hidden at his favourite desk near one of the back windows, where the light was good.

Friday morning, he woke early - earlier than James, even - borrowed the invisibility cloak and made sure everything was in place. He made a mental note to get better at setting timing spells as he yawned his way through the halls, tapping each portrait, statue and suit of armour with his wand.

By the time everyone else was beginning to wake up, Remus had finished, and was snoozing in an armchair in the common room.

"Morning, Moony!" James woke him cheerily, in full quidditch kit, broom in hand.

"Mm morning..."

"See you in Charms!" He called as he exited through the portrait hole. Remus sat up straight and listened intently.

Quiet... footsteps... James whistling... then... yes! The fat lady began to sing in a high falsetto;

" Ride it on out like a bird in the sky ways

Ride it on out like you were a bird

Fly it all out like an eagle in a sunbeam

Ride it on out like you were a bird..."

“What the fuck?!” James exclaimed.

Remus grinned and punched the air. It worked.

The rest of the morning was delightful chaos. Every portrait in the castle had begun to sing ‘Ride a White Swan’, on repeat - and not just the portraits. Every radio, gramophone, record player, statue - anything that could make a noise was now tunefully blaring Marc Bolan’s greatest hit.

The best part was that most of the muggle born students were singing along too, as it was such a catchy song.

The racket was so bad in the end, that McGonagall announced lessons would be cancelled for the day while the teachers worked out how to stop the singing - Remus had added a security measure which meant that ‘Silencio’ only resulted in a volume increase.

Sirius was thrilled, of course.

“Who’d you think did it?” Peter asked, excitedly at the breakfast table.

In the background some sixth year girls were chanting along with the tinny baritone of the armour;

“ Wear a tall hat like a druid in the old days

Wear a tall hat and a tattooed gown

Ride a white swan like the people of the Beltane

Wear your hair long, babe you can't go wrong...”

“I don’t need to *think* , I *know* .” Sirius said, smugly.

Remus smiled. Mary leaned over eagerly,

“Who?!”

“Prongs, obviously!” Sirius said, “Probably trying to make it up to me, about the party.”

Remus’s stomach sank. The idiot.

“Blimey,” Mary said, “James? By himself?” She looked skeptical. Good old Mary.

“Amazing, right?” Sirius kept saying, “I didn’t even think Prongs *knew* any T-Rex songs!”

“Mm.” Remus said, irritably, “Funny thing, that.”

“What’s up with you?” Mary nudged him, “I thought you liked T-rex!”

“I do.” Remus replied, tight lipped. He stood up. “If lessons are cancelled, I s’pose I’ll go and catch up on some homework.”

Sirius looked up, confused.

“I thought we were going to - er - play chess?” Remus shrugged,

“Not in the mood.” He left quickly, before his annoyance became too obvious.

He did go to the library, of course (it was the only quiet place in the castle) but he couldn’t

concentrate on anything - plus, someone had dared to sit in his favourite seat. They were only two second years, and Gryffindors too - if he wanted to play the marauder card he could easily get them to move. But he was in the mood to suffer in silence, so he picked a lesser desk.

Someone had carved something into the wood - who knew how long ago, everything in this damn castle was so old. It was a poem - a few lines of adolescent doggerel.

Never kiss your lover at the garden gate

Love is blind - but your neighbours ain't!

Remus snorted, despite himself. Stupid. Didn't even rhyme properly.

"Alright, *Moody*?"

Remus looked up to see Sirius sauntering towards him, weaving smoothly between the big study desks. A group of girls sitting behind Remus giggled noisily. Remus slouched down further in his seat, folding his arms.

"I'm busy." He grunted, flipping open the nearest book to a random page.

"Mm, you look it." Sirius grabbed a chair, spun it around and straddled it, folding his arms along the back and rested his chin on them, staring at Remus in that annoying way, with that annoying grin.

"Go away." Remus said, looking at his book.

"Moony." Sirius smiled, "It was you, wasn't it?"

Remus shrugged. Sirius snorted, "You twat, why didn't you just *say* so?!"

"Didn't feel like it."

"Ok..."

"I dunno."

"Could it be that you are completely mental, in addition to being a moody git?"

"Bugger off." Remus was starting to smile. He hated that Sirius could always do that. Sirius gave a little sigh.

"Y'know, Moony, if you insist on being so secretive all the time, misunderstandings *will* happen..."

"I know." Remus felt uncomfortable. He wasn't used to Sirius being the logical one. "Sorry." His shoulders sank and he looked down nervously. "Do you like it, though?"

"Of *course* I like it you idiot!" Sirius exclaimed, slapping his hand in the desk. "It's incredible, Remus. Thank you. I..." Sirius pinked slightly, "I really love it."

"You do?" Remus looked up at him.

"I do. I've always loved your magic. It's so... you."

"Shut up." Remus felt himself blushing. It was even harder not to smile, every muscle in his face

was conspiring against him.

He kicked Sirius's foot under the table. Sirius kicked him back.

Seventh Year: Darkness Falls

Chapter Summary

Warning, this chapter gets a bit spooky

Friday 4th November 1977 - 2:00 AM in Gryffindor Tower

“I think there’s something to the colour changing idea.” James slurred, using his goblet to gesture wildly. Thankfully, it was empty, and didn’t spill.

“Nah, it’s too obvious,” Sirius shook his head, just as drunk as James, but handling himself remarkably well, for once.

“Besides,” Lily yawned, from where she sat on the floor, head nodding against James’s knee. “What do we change? Their robes?”

“Their whole dormitory!” Mary suggested, the only one still dancing, winding her arms slowly over her head and rolling her hips to a sultry Nina Simone track. “Complete makeover! Bright pink!”

“Why pink, though?” Sirius said, “Some people might like pink.”

“Ha, on your own, Black!” Marlene pulled a face at him. She was sitting upside down in an armchair, her legs dangling over the back, long blonde hair touching the floor. Her eyes were fixed on Mary moving in front of the fireplace.

They were the last few standing after Sirius’s eighteenth birthday party, which had been as uproarious and over the top as usual. The only non-seventh year remaining was Christopher, who looked like he was struggling to keep his eyes open, but held on valiantly, taking notes for the Slytherin prank which they were currently brainstorming.

“How would we even get hold of their robes, though?” Peter asked, fiddling with the label on his beer bottle, “We had the same problem in first year, remember? With the itching powder.”

“Oh yeah,” James nodded, “That’s right - it was easier to sneak into their common room than it was to work out how the house elves organise the laundry...”

“How *did* you sneak in?” Marlene asked, frowning, “You can’t have perfected an invisibility spell by the age of eleven...”

“Ask us no questions and we shall tell you no lies, McKinnon.” Sirius winked at her. He was watching Mary dance too, his eyes shining with intoxication. “Anyway, we’ve decided not to do it.”

“You decided.” James corrected.

“It’s my birthday!”

“Not anymore, it isn’t,” Peter threw a cushion at him. Sirius threw one back, then James launched

another, and soon enough they were all drunkenly flinging cushions back and forth, giggling dopily.

“Right,” Marlene laughed, after deflecting a big round velvet one, “I’m off to bed.” She placed her hands on the carpet and flipped forward neatly. She brushed her jeans as she got up, a bit wobbly on her feet, then headed for the girls’ dorm.

“Noo,” Mary grabbed her around the waist, “Don’t go, Marls, dance with meee!”

Marlene laughed lightly, but Remus caught an odd flash of annoyance in Marlene’s usually placid face as she gently unwound herself from Mary and backed away.

“I’m sure one of the boys will oblige.” She said, shortly, “Night, all!”

“Night!” They chorused back. Remus vaguely wondered what was going on between the two best friends, but he was too drunk and sleepy to dwell on it very long.

“I think I’ll go up, too.” Christopher was already on his feet, as though he had been waiting for someone else to admit defeat so that he wasn’t the first. “Don’t decide anything without me, though!”

“I really don’t think anyone’s going to formulate a plan tonight.” Lily yawned again. “See you tomorrow, Chris.”

“Night.” The younger boy waved at all of them in his awkward, cheery way.

“If no one wants to dance with me,” Mary sighed, moving to turn off the record player, “I s’pose I’d better get in some beauty sleep too.”

“And me,” Peter got up, tossing back the dregs of his drink.

“And me--” Lily was getting up, when James pulled her into his lap, hugging her close.

“Don’t go yet...”

“Mmm...” She curled into him, sleepily, and they became one unit, cocooned in the big leather armchair. Remus blinked at them blearily and marvelled once again that they had all teased James for years about his certainty that he and Lily were made for each other. Funny how things work out.

“Absolutely obscene.” Sirius tutted, pulling a face at the couple. “Well, if that’s the way this party’s going, I’ll follow Wormtail’s example... coming, Moony?”

“Yep.” Remus got up off the sofa they had been sharing (maintaining a polite and inconspicuous distance, as they had done all evening).

They followed Peter up, and found he was locked in the bathroom, noisily brushing his teeth and gargling. Remus was exhausted, and sat on the end of his bed to wait, yawning and rubbing his eyes.

“Good birthday?” He asked Sirius.

“Brilliant.” Sirius grinned back.

“Good.”

“...If we wait until Pete’s asleep--”

“Bad idea, Padfoot, especially if James isn’t back yet. Anyway, I’m knackered.” He yawned again, as if to prove his point, “Another time.” This was a bit of a white lie. After too many near misses, Remus had been trying to limit the amount of time he spent in Sirius’s bed. It seemed so sneaky and dishonest.

“Another time.” Sirius sighed. “Just... it’s my birthday, and I’ve barely seen you.”

“I’ve been here all day!” This was true, of course - but it was true of all of the marauders, and Lily.

“You *know* what I mean.” Sirius shook his head, impatiently.

Remus did know, but he didn’t have a response that would please Sirius. This same issue kept coming up, and, quite frankly, Remus was getting sick of it. Especially as there was no possible way to solve it until Sirius finally made his mind up. Tired, and getting more irritable by the second, Remus got up and began to change quickly into his pyjamas.

Sirius stood up and came over to him, crossing the beam of moonlight streaking the ancient floorboards. “You’re not avoiding me, are you?” He asked.

“No!” Remus muttered, “I’m just busy. I’ve got a lot on.” If he’d said it once, he’d said it a thousand times.

“Ok.” Sirius said, slowly. “Just, y’know. Lily and James are busy too, but they still seem to find time to--”

“We’re *not* Lily and James, though, are we?!” Remus raised his eyebrow. *Honestly.*

Sirius looked hurt.

“No... but,”

“That was your decision.” Remus said, buttoning his nightshirt. “What was it you said? Not to ‘scream it from the rooftops’. I thought you wanted it this way.”

“I...” Sirius looked lost.

Remus rolled his eyes, exasperated.

“You said you needed time. I’m giving it to you. But you can’t keep whinging about it.”

Sirius withdrew. Remus knew he had won, but there was no joy in the victory.

Fortunately, Peter chose that moment to exit the bathroom. He made a beeline for his bed, head down, waving a lazy hand at them,

“Night, lads...”

“Night Pete!” They both replied, cheerily.

* * *

Saturday 26th November 1977

They could get over little tiffs like that in those days - they could wake up the next morning and

both be ready to wipe the slate clean. At least until the next time. In the end, their desire for each other, their affection - and most of all their friendship - seemed strong enough to win out over any other problems. It was a state of being that Remus would later learn they were taking very much for granted.

On top of this, there was a war on, which may have explained quite a bit. Everyone was slightly melodramatic, and nerves were raw all round. The headlines weren't helping:

MINISTRY RAIDS THREE HOUSES IN SEARCH FOR FORBIDDEN ARTEFACTS

THIRD VAMPIRE ATTACK IN TWO WEEKS

MINISTER JENKINS STEPS DOWN IN WAKE OF DISAPPEARANCES

WEREWOLF REGISTRY 'DANGEROUSLY UNDER-MANAGED' MINISTRY INSIDERS REVEAL

And that was only this week's papers. Something was going on with the Slytherins too - more than the usual classist nonsense. Over the summer - or perhaps before that - a new hierarchy seemed to have formed, creating obvious divisions in the most controversial Hogwarts house.

Regulus Black had always carried a certain amount of clout, of course. The heir to the most noble, exclusive and wealthy pureblood family had been popular amongst his ambitious peer group since his very first day of school. In turn, he had surrounded himself with a faction of pureblood students who seemed to grow nastier by the year. Except for Barty Crouch Jr, perhaps, who had been incredibly nasty even as a little boy.

Now in his sixth year, Regulus did nothing to dispel the rumours that he was not only a death eater, but in regular communication with Lord Voldemort himself. In fact, Regulus seemed to rather enjoy his increased powers, which (according to Christopher, who shared several classes with him) even some of the teachers were observing. He held himself differently. He walked with his back straight, his chin raised, a permanent smirk affixed to his pale face. Remus could hardly recognise the nervous, troubled boy that Sirius had once called 'Reggie'.

Regulus was not stupid. He had never once had a detention, in all his time at school, and was as bright as his older brother when it came to his lessons. Still, unpleasant things seemed to happen to everyone around him. A fourth year Hufflepuff who (rumour had it) knocked over an inkwell on Regulus's desk while he was studying in the library was found two days later locked in a broom cupboard in the dungeons, white as a sheet and completely mute. He had been sent home to recover and had not been seen since.

The Ravenclaw quidditch team practice overran by half an hour one afternoon due to a mix up with the rota - meaning that the Slytherin team's practice had to be pushed back to the following day. The next time the Ravens met they had to cancel their practice altogether, as well as postpone an upcoming match with Gryffindor, because nobody was able to touch their brooms without receiving hundreds of tiny splinters, which could only be removed by Madam Pomfrey.

And the words 'mudbloods get out!' had been magically carved into the chalkboard in the Muggle Studies classroom, so that the lessons had to be moved while the teachers investigated.

Of course, no one ever questioned Regulus, and, as there were no witnesses to any of these crimes, nothing could be done. Everybody knew, though, everybody with any stake in the war. The increasing cruelty and prevalence of such attacks had thrown a shadow over the castle which every student felt now, if they hadn't in previous years.

It might have been the reason that so many people wanted to help the marauders plan their next prank. Though that also had a lot to do with Christopher.

“Did you tell everyone?!” Remus sighed, exasperated, as a third year scuttled out of the study room, flushed and grinning after offering his services to the cause (‘I blow stuff up all the time in potions!’ he had explained, without a trace of irony. Remus had assured him that James and Sirius would be thrilled to hear it.)

“I just mentioned it to a friend...” Christopher replied sheepishly. “You know, a lot of people have got it in for Slytherin, and it’s always a good idea to get a wide range of experience...”

“The marauders do not outsource their pranks.” Remus sniffed, haughtily as they made their way back towards the tower.

“It’s not *outsourcing*,” Christopher countered, “It’s.... er... collaboration.”

“We don’t collaborate, either!”

“Why not? Isn’t that what we’re supposed to be fighting for? Inclusion?”

“Inclusion, yes. Equality, yes. Prank Planning Co-operatives? No.”

Christopher snorted with laughter. Remus smiled. Christopher had an awkward, braying laugh, like a donkey. It was pretty glorious to witness.

“So,” Christopher wheezed, catching his breath and wiping his eyes, “What are your Christmas plans? staying here again?”

“Mm, maybe... or going to the Potter’s. All hangs on whether or not James is going to spend it with Lily’s family.”

“Oh, Merlin, don’t,” Christopher pulled a face, “I think I preferred it when they hated each other. Prefect meetings are *so boring* now, they spend the whole time talking each other up. Enough to give you toothache.”

“I think it’s nice,” Remus said. “James has been bonkers about Lily since second year, if he can finally tell her how amazing she is instead of telling us, then all the better.”

“Yeah, I s’pose you’re right. We should all be so lucky.” Christopher sighed.

They were quiet for a bit after that, just walking together. As they turned the next corner, Remus realised that they hadn’t passed anyone in a while. Fair enough, it was a saturday, but it wasn’t a Hogsmeade weekend, and the weather was too poor for anyone to be outside.

Finally, a first year came hurrying towards them through an archway which led to the east wing. Her eyes were big and frightened, she looked up at the two older boys,

“Ooh,” she squeaked, “Don’t go down there, it’s horrid!” and ran past them, presumably back to her house.

Chris and Remus looked at each other. Chris licked his lips, then squared his shoulders slightly, setting his mouth.

“I *am* a prefect... so I’d better...”

“I’ll come with you.” Remus patted his shoulder. Christopher nodded, looking very relieved.

Remus wished James was there - or Sirius.

They walked side by side through the archway, and found themselves enveloped in total darkness. It was the middle of the afternoon, and Remus knew there were usually windows on this corridor, and even at night it was never *this* dark. Something was very wrong.

“*Lumos*,” they both whispered, lighting their wand tips and holding them up, casting beams of white light across the grey flagstones, the blood red tapestries, the glinting suits of armour. It seemed empty. Christopher took a brave step ahead of Remus, clearing his throat,

“Hello? Is anyone here?” He called.

No response, utter silence. Christopher turned around to look at Remus, squinting and raising an arm to his eyes against the brightness of Remus’s wand light, “Perhaps you ought to go for a teacher?”

“Come back with me, then,” Remus said.

“I...”

There was a noise. A nasty, crawling, slimey squelch, just ahead of Christopher. They both whipped around and aimed their lights at it, but found only an empty corner. Christopher’s heart was pounding hard, he reeked of adrenaline and terror. “There’s something in here...” he whispered, fearfully.

“Come on,” Remus said, “Let’s go and get help...”

“I think it’s over there...” Christopher walked forward again, and Remus lost sight of him and had to go by smell. This was particularly disconcerting - Remus had never met a darkness so black that he could not see through it.

“Chris...?” He reached forward, casting his light about.

“I’ve found it... it’s... no! Oh Merlin, no! No!” Christopher began to scream, somewhere further up the hall.

Without thinking, Remus bolted forward, following the terrible wails,

“Chris!”

He almost tripped over him. Christopher was curled up on the floor, hands covering his head, rocking and sobbing. “What...?” Remus asked, trembling now, as Christopher pointed at it. Remus used his wand to follow his friend's shaking arm, finally throwing light on their tormentor. Remus almost screamed too.

A corpse - a horrible, rotting, shambling corpse was stumbling towards them through the velvet blackness. It slumped forward with a heavy stoop, reaching for Christopher. The eyes were intact, yellow and red – both vacant and ravenous. It still had most of its skin; a grotesque pallet of mottled grey and deep bruise purple. It moaned, a ghastly, rattling sound through crooked yellow teeth.

Remus raised his wand, and stood in front of Chris. He was about to fire a knockback jinx at it - the only thing he could think of at short notice - when it fixed its hungry eyes on him. In a second, it vanished.

Remus blinked, gasping, and suddenly the hallway was filled with a pale, milky light, as a full moon rose before him. The scream died in his throat, and he was gripped with horror - how was it possible?! The moon was not due for a week! He had to run, he had to get away from Christopher, but... wait a minute.

"I know what you are!" Remus's terror turned to elation, as he raised his wand once more, and shouted out confidently; "*Riddikulus* !"

The moon began to expand and transform once more - this time into a huge white beach ball, which began to bounce and spring off the walls, before bursting into a cloud of soapy bubbles. Remus laughed, as loudly as he could under the circumstances, and the boggart retreated. He took his chance, and grabbed Christopher - still curled up, eyes closed tight - under the arm, dragging him back towards the archway as fast as he could.

They came out the other side gasping and blinking hard in the light. Christopher was gripping Remus's robes tightly, his breathing heavy, face ashen.

"Fuck." Remus murmured, feeling pretty shaky himself.

"Th-th-that was a boggart!?" Christopher stutted.

"Yeah, yeah, it was... I've never seen one before, have you?"

Chris shook his head. Remus patted his hands, willing him to let go.

"Hey, it's ok. It wasn't real, remember? C'mon, we have to tell someone, before anyone else runs into it..."

"I'll go." Chris said, getting some of his courage back, "I'll go now... are you ok to wait here? In case someone comes?"

"Of course." Remus nodded, "No one's getting past me." He grinned, trying to make light of it, but Christopher was still too shaken. He nodded grimly, and set off, still gripping his wand.

Alone, Remus reached into his deep robe pockets and pulled out the marauder's map. He'd had it on him for a while now, out of concern that James might take a look one day and wonder which he and Sirius were sharing the bathroom so often. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good," he whispered, tapping the parchment.

The map immediately sprang to life, ink spreading like vines across the page. Remus held it up to his eyes and frantically searched for the corridor with the boggart. There it was, and there he was, 'Remus Lupin', clearly marked out at one end.

He followed the length of it with his finger, it was completely empty; apparently boggarts did not show up, not enough substance, maybe. He reached the end, there was a second archway on the other side, he remembered, covered by a tapestry. Three people were waiting there, quite still. Barty Crouch Jr, Garrick Mulciber and... Remus's stomach sank, though he was not all that surprised. Here it was; proof in black and white. Regulus Black.

Seventh Year: Christmas Part 1

In a miserable twist of fate, the December 1977 full moon fell on Christmas Day. The marauders all agreed to stay at Hogwarts for the duration, with a plan to travel back to the Potter's on Boxing Day. Lily made them all promise that they would meet up as soon as possible in Diagon Alley,

"It's the only place my parents will let me go by myself," she explained to Remus, "I wanted to come to the Potters too, but they're protective and they haven't met James yet."

"Why not invite James to yours?" Remus suggested. Lily bit her lip and shrugged.

"It's just a bit tricky. Maybe for Easter break."

It was a cheerless Christmas, really. James was missing Lily, Peter obviously wished he was at home, not stuck at school, Sirius was anxious and jittery whenever he and Remus were in the same room with someone else, and Remus himself was grumpy and irritable, waiting for the moon to take hold.

They didn't do anything very Christmassy, either, other than go down for lunch with the other students who had stayed. They had promised Mrs Potter not to exchange gifts until they could all be together.

"I feel awful." Remus sighed, as he wound his scarf around his neck, ready to start heading towards the shack ahead of his friends. "You lot should be at home. I could have stayed by myself – or used your attic again, Prongs."

"Don't be silly," James shook his head manfully, "I know how bad it is for you, in the attic, tied down like that. The shack is the best place – at least we can all run about a bit."

And he was right, of course. They all needed a good run, and in the morning, Remus woke up and looked at his friend's rosy, grinning faces, and knew they all felt much better for it.

They couldn't leave immediately, of course, Madam Pomfrey would not allow it. Remus was prescribed his usual morning of sleep, and he hoped that the other marauder's had taken the opportunity to do the same.

When he woke up in the infirmary, Sirius was sitting in the chair next to him, grinning, two suitcases at his feet.

"Ready when you are!" He said, cheerfully, and Remus felt a pang of guilt again. Sirius needed to get home to the Potters' just as much as James did.

"Have you packed for me?" Remus sat up, blinking, "Blimey."

"Of course I haven't," Sirius snorted, "Prongs did. I made sure he got the book on your bedside table, though."

Remus opened his mouth to speak, but Sirius raised a hand, "*And* the one under your pillow. Don't worry, Moony, nothing gets past me."

"Cheers," Remus smiled. "Just let me get dressed, then..."

"Sure you'll be ok to floo?" Sirius asked, as Remus swivelled out of the bed, his bare feet landing

on the cold flagstones. He felt a bit weak and woozy, but no worse than usual. He nodded,

“Yeah. Apparated after a full moon once, remember?”

“Ok. But you should say, if you don’t feel up to it.”

“I will. Pass my jeans, will you?”

Sirius complied. Remus dressed, slowly, checking his body with every stretch and turn, making sure everything was working as it should be. He was starving hungry, but willing to wait for Mrs Potter’s cooking. “Where are the others?” Remus asked, bending now to tie his shoelaces.

“Common room,” Sirius replied. He held up his silver compact mirror, “I’m to let Prongs know when we’re on our way to McGonagall’s office, they’ll meet us.”

“Great.” Remus nodded. He stopped for a moment, dizzy again, and pretended to just be stretching.

“Moony?”

“Mmm...?” Remus began his second shoe, concentrating very hard.

“I’m going to tell Prongs, over Christmas.”

“What?!” He straightened up so suddenly that he had to grab Sirius’s arm to stop from wobbling over. His head swam, and he blinked a few times while equilibrium restored itself. “Tell... Prongs?”

“Yeah.” Sirius looked very pale, his eyes big, “If it’s ok with you? I think I’d better.”

“Of course. Yeah. I mean. Wow. Why now?”

Sirius shrugged,

“Something’s got to give. And I’m mental about you.”

Remus’s face grew hot and he looked away. He nudged Sirius’s toe with his own,

“Shut up.”

“Never.” Sirius poked his tongue out. “So it’s ok?”

“Yeah. Of course it is. Will you let me know... when?”

“Definitely. I want to pick the right time.”

“Ok.”

“I’ll go and get Pomfrey now, shall I?”

“Cheers.” And with that, Sirius jumped up and disappeared behind the screen. Remus sat still for a few minutes, stunned. Well. People could always surprise you.

* * *

Boxing Day afternoon at the Potters was a welcome change of pace. Euphemia wanted to know all about Lily, and Fleamont wanted to know how the new Gryffindor quidditch line-up was working out. This led to a very long and involved argument between Peter, Sirius, James and his father, as

they complained about the poor new chaser – something Eriksson – and fretted over whether or not this would be the end to Gryffindor's six year winning streak.

In the end, Remus and Euphemia abandoned them to this and went into the kitchen to help Gully with the washing up. Mrs Potter pulled up a seat for Remus by the sink, and said,

"You just sit there, my love, and you can dry. Don't want you on your feet all evening, or you'll never get up tomorrow. And it sounds like the boys have a lot planned."

They worked away in companionable silence for a while, Remus practiced several drying spells before giving up and just using a dishcloth. Maybe he would never be any good at domestic incantations.

"Comes with practice," Euphemia smiled. Her face was soft in the twinkle of the fairy lights, and though she looked tired, and older than Remus had remembered her, she looked content and homely. Just as a mother should look, in his mind.

"Mrs Potter?"

"Yes dear?"

"You knew my dad, didn't you?"

"Lyll? A little bit, but not well. Monty knew him better, they crossed paths at the Ministry once or twice... and I believe they were both partial to a few Friday night pints in the Leaky Cauldron," she clucked her tongue indulgently.

"What about Hope?"

Euphemia set down the plate she had been about to hand over, and looked down at him. He swallowed, "Hope Lupin? My mother. She was a muggle."

"Yes, I know, dear. I only met her once."

"But you *met* her." He stared at James's mother, amazed. Why had it never occurred to him before? She pulled off her bright yellow marigolds and sat down in the chair beside him.

"We were only introduced. We were both pregnant, at the time, that's the only reason I remember. She was a lot younger than me, and – as you say – a muggle. We moved in different circles, I suppose. Lyll was a very private man."

"What was she like?!" Remus asked, desperately, "Was she... nice?"

"Oh, Remus," Euphemia reached over and took his hand, which was cold from the dishes, and felt a bit too familiar. He didn't want to upset her, though, so he let her do it. "She was *very* nice, from what I remember. Mousey little thing, blonde hair, and a lovely smile. Very small, I remember thinking – though next to Lyll, anyone looked small. I don't remember what the occasion was, but we were both enormous – I remember her telling me she was expecting in March. I told her to get in touch if she needed anything, but I'm afraid she never did. Perhaps she didn't know how to do it."

Remus looked down. If he had made it through his childhood unscathed, perhaps in time his mother might have made more friends. Perhaps she would have befriended Mrs Potter, and perhaps they would all have spent Christmases together.

“I was given a letter,” Remus said, slowly. “When I turned seventeen. She wrote it – Hope – before giving me away. She said in it... she said I might try to find her.”

“Is that what you’d like?”

“I don’t know. Maybe she’s changed her mind by now.”

“Remus.” Euphemia said, very fiercely, “I can promise you she hasn’t. If you want to look for your mother, then just give me the word. Monty can do it in a trice.”

Remus looked up, finally, and smiled.

“Thank you.”

He went to bed early, and was woken by Sirius, creeping in under the covers. The house had grown quiet, and it was very dark out.

“Sorry,” Sirius whispered, smelling faintly of brandy, and warm all over as he wound his arms around Remus, “Di’n’t mean to wake you up.”

“Yeah, you did.” Remus murmured, sleepily. “Haven’t told Prongs yet, then?”

“Nah,” Sirius shook his head against Remus’s arm, burying his face under the duvet, “I thought tomorrow. After Diagon Alley, before dinner.”

“Ok.” Remus sighed, closing his eyes and settling back to sleep. Just before he drifted off, he whispered, “You better set an alarm of something, then, so you can get back to your own bed, before...” But no. Sirius had fallen sound asleep.

* * *

Tuesday 27th December 1977

“COME ON, COME ON! HURRY UP!” James was bellowing up the stairs as Remus searched for his woolly hat.

“Calm down you lunatic, we’re almost ready!” Sirius yelled back, from the landing, where he was re-arranging his parting in the full length mirror.

“No shouting in the house, boys!” Euphemia called from the kitchen.

“I can’t find it. Did you pack it?” Remus huffed, hanging off his door frame.

“I told you, I left packing to Prongs. OI, PRONGS! YOU FORGOT MOONY’S HAT YOU BASTARD!”

“I ASKED YOU TO HELP ME!” James shouted back, “YOU SAID I HAD EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL!”

“I ASSUMED YOU DID!”

“SORRY, MOONY!”

“IT’S OK, PRONGS!” Remus joined in, a bit embarrassed. “I’ll go without.” He said, “It’s not that cold.”

“Have mine,” Sirius shrugged, tossing his head again, still eyeing himself in the mirror, “I don’t want to muck up my hair, anyway, “*Accio* hat.”

Sirius’s red woollen hat, emblazoned with a Gryffindor lion came shooting out of the rubbish tip he called a bedroom, and Remus grabbed it from the air and rammed it down on his head.

“Ok. Let’s go!”

“Finally!” James met them at the bottom of the stairs, where he had been waiting for a good half an hour now.

“Where’s Wormtail?”

“Sent an owl, doesn’t feel like it, apparently. Grumpy git.”

“Yeah, well for once I don’t blame him for not wanting to floo to London on a winter’s day just to see you and Evans snog.” Sirius teased.

“That’s not *all* we do!” James’s ears turned red. “Anyway, if that’s true, why are you and Moony coming?”

“I want some new books and he’s a voyeur.” Remus shrugged. “C’mon, let’s go, shall we?”

Remus remembered to keep his eyes and mouth closed this time, and liked to think that he arrived in the fireplace of The Leaky Cauldron with some dignity, even if he *had* tripped over the cast iron grate. Luckily, he stumbled straight into Lily’s arms, as she had been anxiously awaiting their arrival.

“Oof!” She yelped, staggering but just about keeping upright. “Hiya, Remus!”

“Hi,” he laughed, getting his own balance, “My hero!”

“Too late, Prongs,” Sirius said, brushing himself off, as he stepped neatly over the grate, “You’ve lost her to a better man already.”

“It was inevitable, I suppose.” James grinned, following him out. Lily let go of Remus immediately and flung herself at James, who looked thrilled to bits.

They managed to find a table to sit at in the crowded pub, and ordered four butterbeers.

“Busy, isn’t it!” Remus said, raising his voice over the din as he pushed through the throngs of shoppers with the drinks.

“Sales,” Lily said, casually, “Oxford Street’s just as bad, I was there with Mum this morning.”

“Anyone here we know?” Sirius asked, raising his head to look about at the faces,

“Um... not really... Ooh, er, I did see Frank, earlier – do you remember Frank Longbottom? He was Head Boy in our first year.” Lily said, before ducking her head and focusing on her drink – and James’s hand, which was on her hip and snaking slowly underneath her green wool jumper.

Once they had finished their drinks, they were all keen to get out of the noisy, overwarm pub and into the fresh air. The street, however, was just as packed. It seemed to Remus that the entire wizard population of Britain must be crammed into these few crooked streets, all wrapped up in heavy winter robes, carrying bags and baskets and boxes, cheerily wishing each other merry Christmas or else rudely barging through the hustle and bustle to get to the shop they wanted.

“Try to stay together!” James threw over his shoulder at Sirius and Remus, before promptly disappearing into the throng with Lily.

“Let’s just do our shopping and find them later,” Sirius huffed, put out. “Did you say you wanted books?”

“Yeah,” Remus nodded, distracted. “Can you smell that?”

“Smell what?” Sirius asked, pulling Remus’s robe in the direction of Flourish & Blott’s. Remus followed, but sniffed the air again. The trouble was, it was so hard to describe a scent – even to Sirius, whose own canine attributes sometimes surfaced even when he was in human form.

“I dunno.” He said, lamely, “Just smells different than last time. The magic. It’s probably just all these people.”

“You can *smell* magic?!”

“Oh. Yeah, I can.”

“Bloody hell.”

The bookshop was manic, but Remus didn’t mind. He would have been content to wander the shelves all day, row by row, picking through and reading blurbs and stroking covers. He was having the best afternoon he’d had in ages, until he was interrupted.

“Well, well. Look who it is.” Remus looked up, and saw Snape standing only a few meters away. He reeked of sliver, so Remus stayed back.

“What do you want, Snivellus?” He tutted, pretending to be unconcerned, returning to the book he was looking at.

“You and your little band of delinquents might think you own the school, *Loony Lupin*,” Severus tutted, “But you do not have any claim on Diagon Alley. I’m allowed to shop wherever I like.”

“Well. Piss off and shop, then.” Remus shrugged, turning away. He was starting to feel sick, and he wanted Snape and whatever he was hiding under his robes *gone*.

“You’re in my way.” Snape narrowed his cold black eyes. He began to advance on Remus, reaching over his shoulder for a book on potions. Remus’s hands began to shake, so he put his book down and moved away, shoving his hands inside his pockets. Where was Sirius?

“Feeling all right, Loony?” Snape smiled maliciously.

“What are you *doing* with that much silver on you, you freak?” Remus choked, leaning back on the bookcase behind him, his eyes watering.

“One can’t be too careful.” Snape purred. “You get all sorts, ‘round here.”

“All right, Snivellus?” Sirius’s voice came from just behind them. Remus sighed with relief as Snape reeled back, looking as though he’d been caught stealing. Sirius stepped out from behind the bookcase, arms folded, “Get lost on the way to Knockturn Alley, did you? Or maybe just in town for your annual hair wash?”

“Fuck off, Black.”

“Oh, please, after you,” Sirius made a sweeping bow, allowing Severus to stalk off, mumbling

darkly to himself. Remus chuckled, weakly.

“Thanks,” he said.

“You ok?”

Hm. Better not to worry him, about the silver. Probably just Snape being his usual revolting self.

“Fine.” Remus smiled. “Come on, let’s go and find the others, shall we?”

“Don’t you want to buy your books?”

“Nah,” Remus shook his head, “I just wanted to make a note of the names, see if Pince will order them into the school library for me. Free, that way.”

“Fair enough. C’mon then, mad in here.”

They had to push most of their way outside, and once they were out, Remus needed a breather, and had to lean against the wall in the alleyway beside the shop.

“Are you sure you’re ok?!” Sirius asked, tugging at a lock of his long hair, anxiously.

“Fine!” Remus breathed, nodding again. The sickly feeling was receding, now, he just needed a minute. “Just the moon, probably. Still tired.”

“What did Snivellus want?”

“Oh, the usual nonsense,” Remus screwed up his face, “I don’t think he meant to bump into me. What’s Knockturn Alley?”

“Over there,” Sirius nodded across the street to another alleyway, slightly wider than the one they were standing in, which clearly led to more shops. “It’s where the dodgier types hang out. Dark wizards, banshees in disguise, vampires. That sort of thing.”

“Oh.” And werewolves. Remus knew this instantly. There was a very faint scent, now he knew what to look for. Someone who had been there recently. Not Livia.

“James’s dad was telling me they’re planning a raid on some of the shops down there in the New Year – reckon they’re stocking illegal supplies. Bet you anything it’s where Snivellus snuck off to.”

Remus stared at Knockturn Alley for a while, as he caught his breath. Whatever the strange new scent was, it was coming from there. He’d smelled something like it before; from Moody. Dark Magic – burnt around the edges, charred flesh. He shivered.

“Quality Quidditch Supplies?” He suggested, “If James is anywhere he’ll be there,”

“Good shout!” Sirius nodded, “Let’s go then.”

They left the shadowy alleyway, and stepped out into the bright winter sunshine. It hadn’t snowed this year, but it was still bitterly cold, and the sky was clear, making the air fresh and crisp with energy. As they crossed the road, slowly past the gaggles of witches shopping with their children, the wizards stopping to pass the time of day, and house elves running errands for their masters, the energy seemed to change, slightly. It made the hairs on Remus’s stand up neck, like the arrival of a predator. He tensed, and looked around. He caught sight of Lily and James looking at the latest broom in the window of Quality Quidditch Supplies. He was about to turn and get Sirius’s

attention, when it happened.

BANG

The front of The Leaky Cauldron exploded in a plume of thick, blood red smoke, bricks and wood and glass flying out into the street. There was barely a microsecond of stunned silence before the screams started, wails of pain and terror and shock. The chaos around them seemed to expand and contract, like a crashing wave.

CRACK CRACK CRACK, people were apparating around them – many were leaving, but a few were arriving, too. These were the ones that made something deep inside Remus want to start growling.

BANG

Another shop, further up the street exploded too, then another, and...

“Get down!” Sirius full-body tackled Remus to the ground, and they both covered their faces as Quality Quidditch Supplies went up in smoke.

Seventh Year: Christmas Part 2

The ground shook, and Remus squeezed his eyes shut, belly down on the cobblestones. Everything after that moment – seeing Lily and James’s heads turn, before the building in front of them exploded – everything after that made so little sense. It was all too slow, or too fast, and Remus found he did not react in his usual way – he was weak, frightened, his comprehension muddled. He felt stunned.

They raised their heads – he and Sirius – much too long after it had gone quiet, when people around them were already standing up, and were shouting, or crying. Someone was definitely crying, a woman. That seemed loudest of all. And someone laughing, too, a thin, razor sharp cackle in the distance, pure joy.

Diagon Alley looked like a bomb site. The shops which had been destroyed were like broken teeth in a gaping maw; strange blue patches of sky where something else should be. It was hard to see much on ground level, but they squinted through the settling dust further down the street towards Gringotts, where most of the noise seemed to be coming from,

“You two!” A woman hissed, coming towards them from behind, picking through the rubble, her wand raised, “Get back! Behind me!” She stalked ahead. Her robes were deep maroon, an auror’s uniform.

“James!” Sirius choked, his voice strange and strangled with terror. He scrambled to his feet, his robes all dusty and his hair full of soot. He half ran, half stumbled, towards the hole in the sky where the quidditch supply shop had stood, minutes before.

“Sirius no...” Remus coughed, weakly, following him, feeling stupid and heavy.

“James!?” Sirius was shouting, but so many people were shouting.

“Sirius!” Remus coughed again, trying hard to keep up, but he’d bruised his hip when he’d hit the ground, and his ears were still ringing, and his eyes were starting to go blurry as he wiped away tears with dusty wrists. “Sirius—”

“MUDBLOODS OUT!”

Remus dropped to his knees, covering his ears, and he was not the only one. The voice seemed to be right behind him – inside his head, it was everywhere. The crowd was silent, finally, as everyone stared around, blinking, looking for the owner of the horrible, insidious voice.

Whatever was going on, it was happening further away – Remus could smell magic now, and see beams of light firing through the dust cloud surrounding Gringotts. He could smell Moody, and... Ferox? Maybe him. And the death eaters. Some of them he recognised, others he didn’t – but they were there, and there were a lot of them. Where was Sirius? The ruins of the shop which had stood before them was still bleeding smoke, and Sirius had wandered straight into it, the idiot.

Gritting his teeth, and with not a little pain, Remus pushed himself to his feet again. He had to find them.

The shouts of battle were getting louder, more desperate; the woman who had ordered him and Sirius back had joined in, and Remus’s conscience told him he ought to go and help. But James, and Lily, and Sirius...

“*Morsmorde!*” The same voice spoke, close and far away.

The smoke filling the street seemed to writhe and darken, expanding and swirling upwards to form an enormous snake entwined with a screaming, hollow eyed black skull.

“It’s him!” A man near Remus shouted, “It’s you know who!”

“*Silencio!*” Someone else hexed him into quiet. An odd stillness, more flashes – blue, green, yellow, red, and then...

CRACK CRACK CRACK, they were getting away!

For the first time, Remus thought to withdraw his wand, fumbling about in his borrowed robes for it. As he did, his fingers brushed against something else – smooth and heavy. His fingers closed around his pocket watch and he wrenched it out, prising it open quickly and saying aloud,

“Sirius Black.”

The needle did not even wobble, but pointed forward immediately, and Remus followed it towards the ruin of the shop. “Sirius?! Sirius?!”

“Moony!” A hand grabbed his shoulder and he whipped around desperately.

“James!”

James hugged him, fiercely, and Remus didn’t even think about how unusual it was, he was just so, so grateful, and relieved, he hugged him back. Lily appeared at his shoulder, pale faced, her hair falling out of its ponytail, clothes smudged with ash. There was a cut just under her hairline, dark blood oozing down into her left eyebrow. And Sirius, too, *thank god thank god thank god*.

“I lost you.” Remus said, hoarsely, once James let him go. One of the lenses in his glasses was shattered.

“I’m sorry.” Sirius said, sounding just as awful.

“We’d better go and help,” James said, shaking both their shoulders, “The battle’s—”

“Finished.” Remus said. “They ran away. Disapparated, most of them. How did you two...” he stared at Lily and James, still not quite believing his eyes.

“Frank.” Lily said, sounding much smaller than Remus had ever heard her. James wrapped an arm around her. “Frank’s an auror. He used a knock-back jinx on us, right before the shop was hit, then *protego*, I think. I didn’t... I didn’t know what to do.” Her eyes filled with tears, and James wrapped his other arm around her, enveloping her completely.

“I didn’t, either.” Remus said, as if it would help. “Didn’t even get my wand out.”

Sirius was gripping his, though. He looked dreadful; fierce as a demon, eyes full of hatred,

“I’m going anyway. They might still need help.” He said.

Remus grabbed him by the shoulders, surprising even himself with his strength.

“Don’t. You. Dare.” He growled, meeting Sirius’s eye. Something distinctly canine passed between them, then, and Remus almost thought they were going to actually fight, and that it would be sort of a relief if they did. But of course, James intervened.

“Moony’s right,” he said, “We ought to—”

CRACK

“Boys!”

“Dad!”

Fleamont Potter had arrived right next to James. He grabbed his son, then Sirius, then Remus – who had recovered enough now to find the hugging all a bit much – and then stared with horror at what remained of Diagon Alley. His bushy eyebrows knit, and he addressed his son,

“Are you all ok? Your mother wants you back at the house immediately, she’s been called to St. Mungo’s, otherwise she’d be here.”

“Shouldn’t we stay and help?” James asked, looking troubled, still holding Lily tightly to his chest. *What a bloody hero*, Remus thought. He still had Sirius by the shoulders, gripping him hard because he couldn’t hug him.

Fleamont looked at James and seemed to grow a few inches with pride. He smiled,

“No, son, it’s all in hand – Moody’s there, and Dumbledore’s on his way. I just want you all home and safe, before anything—”

“No one is to leave!” A man was shouting, cutting through the crowd and the rubble with an authoritative stride. “Not until they have been questioned by—oh, hello Monty. Didn’t know you were here.”

“Amos,” Mr Potter nodded at the ministry official. “Got here as soon as I could. Taking the boys home, they were out shopping and got caught up.”

“That so?” The official – Amos – came over to look at them all. “Names?”

“Amos, is that really necc—”

“Names?” He repeated, in a harder tone.

“Well you *know* James, you’ve known him since he was five, for goodness sake...” Fleamont tutted, “And this is Miss Evans, I presume?” He glanced at Lily, who had stopped crying, but still looked very frightened.

“Yes.” She squeaked. “Lily Evans.”

“Evans?” Amos looked thoughtful. He pulled some parchment out of his pocket, “Evans, Evans... Parents names?”

“You wouldn’t know them.” She said, her eyes darting between James and the official, “I’m muggleborn.”

Amos looked down his nose at her again, then eyed James with a rude quirk of his eyebrow.

“I see. Very well. And you two? Oh hoho! I know *you*! You’re the Black heir!”

“Was.” Sirius muttered. He shook himself free of Remus and shoved his hands in his pockets, adopting a sullen, irritable attitude which always appeared when his family was mentioned. Remus wished he could tell him not to do that. It didn’t make him look any less guilty.

“He’s coming home with us, too.” Fleamont said, quickly. “Sirius has lived with us for well over a year now, and—”

“Come come, Monty,” Amos tutted, “The Black heir? I’m not stupid, and neither are you. He’ll have to be questioned.”

“Absolutely not.” Fleamont raised his voice. Remus had never heard him shout before – it was even more terrifying than a dark mark. “They’re school kids, for godric’s sake!”

“Plenty of school kids on *their side* too, from what I hear.” Amos said, “Plenty of Black’s, too.”

“I’m not interested in that. You can speak with Dumbledore if you have to, but I am responsible for these boys and I am taking them all home right now.”

“What about you?” Amos suddenly turned on Remus, who blinked. Sometimes he forgot that the Potters included him in their responsibilities.

“R-Remus.” He said, trying to be brave, but failing miserably. *What if this man knows something? What if he knows I’m a werewolf?* “Lupin.”

“Hmph.” Amos made a note, but asked no further questions. “You’re all to wait here while I speak with Dumbledore.” He said, pompously.

“Like hell we will.” Fleamont snorted, “If you want to go and interrupt Albus Dumbledore while he assists in the investigation of a terrorist attack for the sake of a few frightened teenagers, then —”

“Amos!” Someone – was it really *Frank?* – shouted from the distance, “Where the hell are you, we need you up here – it’s Leo!”

The official turned, sharply, and with a reluctant final glance at Sirius, he ran towards the voice. Mr Potter leapt into action, taking no chances,

“Quick, boys – are you all ok to apparate? Miss Evans, probably best you come with us for now?”

Lily nodded, and James kissed her, before they both disappeared together, hand in hand. Fleamont nodded at Sirius and Remus, before vanishing with a loud CRACK himself. Remus looked at Sirius. Sirius looked at him too, still angry, still full of a hot desire for revenge.

“Oh no.” Remus said, firmly, then, barely even thinking about it, grabbed Sirius’s elbow, hard, and prepared to apparate with him.

Sirius fought it, mid-turn – the stupid fool could easily have splinched them, as he strained against Remus’s spell, wanting only to stay where the fight was. But Remus was stronger – the air was full of fizzing, roaring leftover magic, and Remus drank from it, overpowering Sirius with the sheer weight of his own determination.

They arrived on the Potter’s front porch with such force their heads banged together, and they wrenched apart, panting, feeling scorched.

“Fucking hell, Moony!” Sirius gasped, rubbing his elbow where Remus had grabbed him.

“Had to... stop you... idiot...” Remus bent forward, hands on his knees. He felt completely drained, but buzzing with it; nerves alight with static.

James opened the door,

“Get inside,” he said, “Quickly.”

Sirius pushed past Remus without looking at him.

Lily stayed for another hour or so, drinking cup after cup of tea, as Gully scuttled back and forth from the kitchen, wringing his little wizened hands and shaking his head woefully. Mr Potter apologised profusely to Lily, and hoped they would meet again soon under better circumstances – before locking himself away in his study. After that they sat in silence for most of the time; with only the occasional outburst from James or Sirius.

“Snape!” Sirius ranted, pacing back and forth, “We saw him in the bookshop, he threatened Moony – he must have had something to do with it!”

“You don’t know that.” Lily said, shakily, staring at the pattern of her teacup.

“Did anyone see any of them, though?!”

“No.” James shook his head. “Too busy trying to take cover.”

“No.” Lily shook her head.

“No...” Remus said. Sirius looked up at him,

“Moony. You smelled something. You told me, remember? Do you know who—”

“Remus you can *smell* people?!” Lily looked up, half shocked, half curious. “Like a *scent*?”

“Not like... it’s just a... a wolf thing. Instinct. But I didn’t. I don’t...” Remus wished the ground would swallow him up.

He could tell them. But he didn’t want to break it to Sirius like this; not while they were furious at each other, and frightened, and Lily and James were sitting right there.

“Moony.” Sirius said, in a very low, dark voice that none of them had ever heard before. “Tell me. Who?”

Remus looked at James, desperately for help, but he was just staring back, waiting. Lily too, her mouth slightly open. He looked at Sirius again, and tried to hold his stare.

“I think Regulus was there. But *lots* of people where there Sirius—”

Sirius threw his hands up and left the room in utter silence. Lily gave a very tired sigh.

“James,” she said, “I think I had better go home. Mum and Dad will wonder.”

James insisted on apparating back with Lily, then returning by himself. Remus wished he hadn’t. He didn’t want to be left alone. Alone, it all came flooding back into his mind, as vivid as a cinema screen. The noise, the smoke, the utter terror. And shame. He had not acted. His first chance to prove to Dumbledore, and Moody, and even *Snivellus*, that he was on the right side, and willing to fight for it. But he had never expected it to be like that. Had never considered that when the time came, and you were on a battlefield with the only people you love in the world – all he’d wanted to do was find them, and run away.

When James returned, he found Remus pacing, treading the same stretch of carpet Sirius had been

earlier.

“Are you ok, Moony?” He asked, nervously, taking slow steps forward, arms up, as if Remus was an untamed beast.

“I didn’t do anything.” Remus muttered, still pacing. “I just... I couldn’t move. I couldn’t think.”

“Remus...” James kept speaking in that steady, friendly tone. It was more soothing than Remus wanted to admit. “Nobody could. It was horrible; it’s the scariest thing that ever happened.”

Remus stopped dead, and stared at James. He gave a half smile and shrugged, “None of us knew what to do.”

“Sirius did.” Remus challenged. “He was the one who got up. He wanted to help...”

“Sirius never *thinks* though, Moony, you know that.”

“Oi, up yours, Potter.” Sirius suddenly appeared in the doorway, arms folded. His eyes were a bit pink, but he didn’t look angry any more. Remus smiled at him, hopefully, behind James’s back. Sirius smiled back, reassuringly.

“I was *going* to say,” James laughed, “That’s what makes you so *brave*, you wanker. You just want to rush in and help, even if it’s the worst idea in the world.”

“Yes, ok, it was not a good idea.” Sirius said, sitting down on the sofa, beside James.

“At least you *did* something.” Remus said, “At least you *got up*.”

“You got up, too, Remus.” Sirius said, softly.

“After you did!” Remus shot back, “I was pathetic, I was... how are we ever going to win this war if it’s going to be like that?! If I’m too scared to...”

“I was scared too.” Sirius said, looking up. “I’m not *that* bonkers. I was still bricking it, I mean. Fucking hell.”

“Don’t.” James said, running his hand through his hair, still gritty with rubble. “It took me so long to even figure out what happened – and all I could think about was getting Lily somewhere safe. I thought I would just do anything to make sure she was safe.”

“There you are then.” Sirius said, firmly. “That’s how we win it.”

* * *

Mrs Potter did not come back from St Mungo’s all night, but Fleamont stepped out of his office to tell the boys he had spoken to her, and that she was all right, before asking Gully to make him a sandwich and closing the door again.

Peter came over, white and shaking – he had heard the news, apparently he had a cousin working for *The Daily Prophet*. There was no useful information though. No death count yet, it hadn’t been finalised. Peter stayed for supper, but James was the only one really able to keep up a proper conversation, and eventually Peter left. When Remus announced he wanted an early night, the other two shrugged and agreed to go up too.

After showering and washing the dust and smoke out of his hair, he brushed his teeth in the cold quiet bathroom and tried not to think about how odd it felt to be doing such normal things on such

an abnormal day. He could hear Sirius and James murmuring quietly in the next room, solemn, tense tones. He decided to leave them to it.

Hours later, Remus was seriously regretting that decision. He couldn't sleep. He waited and waited for Sirius to come, until he realised that he must still be in with James, and might not come at all. Remus lay on his back and tried to keep his thoughts from getting too loud. *This is war*, he kept thinking. *This is what you agreed to do. You promised Dumbledore. You promised your friends.*

Finally, in the small hours, when he was sick from tiredness and the first pink rays of sunrise were peeking around the curtains, his door opened. Sirius crept across the room with the stealth of a cat.

"Remus?" He whispered from the foot of the bed. Remus rolled over.

"I'm here."

Sirius practically flew at him, sliding in under the covers and burying his head under the duvet. They clung to each other, and everything steadied itself. Remus felt was calm at last. In a moment, Sirius moved slightly and whispered,

"Tell me a secret? A nice one?"

Remus paused. He kissed Sirius's hair.

"I'm mental about you, too."

Sevenths Year: Christmas Part 3

Monday 2nd January 1978

The next week and a half was one of the darkest Remus could remember. When Mrs Potter finally arrived home the day after the attack, she was white and drawn, and hugged her family so tight, as if she had thought she would never see them again.

“About fifty dead, so I’ve heard.” She said, solemnly. “I was mostly triage, though. Hundreds wounded.”

“Any... any of us?” Mr Potter asked. He looked as though he hadn’t slept in hours – and indeed, as far as Remus knew, he had not been to bed either.

Euphemia nodded, closing her eyes.

“Later.” She said, casting a glance at the boys. James looked indignant.

“We can hear it.” He said. “We’re all of age, *and* we were there when it happened!”

“Yes, I know you were!” Mrs Potter shouted, her voice shrill. James’s mouth snapped shut and he looked down, ashamed. Mrs Potter got up. “I’m going for a lie down.”

She left the room, and the men sat in silence.

“Sorry, dad.” James mumbled.

“It’s all right.” Fleamont removed his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “We’re all upset. Your mother and I need you boys to listen, and do as you’re told until it’s time to go back to school, do you understand?”

They all nodded, reluctantly, and Remus saw the muscles in Sirius’s jaw tighten. It was a mark of his respect for Mr Potter that he did not protest. “Now,” Fleamont continued, “This house is going to be very busy for the next few days, and you’re going to see a lot of very important people doing very important work. Do not ask too many questions, and do not make nuisances of yourselves.”

“Can’t we help?” James asked, earnestly.

“Yes.” Fleamont nodded. “By being gracious hosts and minding your mother.”

“Yes, dad.” James sighed, looking down again, obviously disappointed.

“James...” Fleamont began, reaching over to touch his son’s arm.

Remus and Sirius took that as their cue to clear the table, and waited around in the kitchen, half-heartedly helping Gully do the washing up.

“I don’t see what the fuss is about.” Sirius grumbled, elbow deep in soap suds. “If they knew half of the things we were capable of – we can actually *help*.”

“We’ll have our chance.” Remus replied, staring out of the window as he dried the plates. The garden was very dark, and a chill mist hung in the air, making it difficult to see much beyond the patio wall. He could just make out James’s quidditch hoops on the lawn, and the dim waning moon. He didn’t like not being able to see very far, it made him uneasy.

“That’s all right for *you* to say.” Sirius was still complaining, “You’ve already proved yourself.”

”What?!” Remus glanced up at him, confused, and momentarily distracted from the window.

“With that werewolf you met, last year. You’ve already faced the enemy and shown Dumbledore he can trust you.”

“I don’t think I explained that properly, if that’s what you think...” Remus said. “Livia wasn’t... it wasn’t about the war.”

“Dumbledore thinks it was. Moody does. They talk about the werewolves all the time – how useful you’ll be trying to convince the dark creatures not to join *you know who*.”

“Can we talk about something else?”

“Fine.”

They talked about nothing. They did the dishes in complete silence. Remus stared out of the window into the blackness of the Potter grounds and looked for... something.

Finally, James came in, just as they finished putting away the last of the china.

“All right, mate?” Sirius asked, cheerily.

“Yeah,” James shrugged, looking somehow wiser; older. “Just dad stuff, y’know.”

Sirius and Remus glanced at each other, and Remus knew they were both experiencing the same sour envy. What did it mean to have a father like Fleamont Potter? To have one at all?

“I said I’d give Lily a ring, if you two fancied a walk into the village?”

“Why not.” Sirius said, leaving the dish rag over the tap.

“Oh, Moony, dad said to give you this?” James handed over a small scroll of paper. Remus opened it quickly, glancing over the neat name and address written there. James cocked his head, curious,

“What is it?”

“Oh nothing. Book I was asking about.” Remus stuffed it in his pocket. “C’mon. Calls are cheaper after six.”

James had finally learnt how to use the phone box unaided, so there was nothing for Remus to do but lean against the fence next to Sirius, waiting. He rolled cigarettes to pass the time; he’d cut the fingers off his gloves back in November for explicitly this purpose.

“I didn’t mean you.” Sirius said, quietly. “When I said dark creatures.”

“I know you didn’t.” Remus licked the rizla then smoothed it down. He handed the completed cigarette to Sirius, who took it and put it behind his ear. Remus began another one.

“Got to teach me how to do that one day.” Sirius murmured, watching him appreciatively. “I bet we could work out a spell to do it instantly.”

“Probably,” Remus sighed, lining up tobacco. “But I like doing it this way.”

“Fair enough.”

They were quiet again. Remus finished his second one and held it between his thumb and forefinger, wondering whether or not to smoke it. Mrs Potter didn't like the smell on them, and he hated to add to her troubles. But on the other hand, he could really use something to calm his nerves. Sirius could too, if the constant tapping of his leg was anything to go by. He was chewing his fingernails, too.

Remus lit the cigarette with a snap of his fingers, and inhaled. Sirius followed suit. His leg stilled.

"I am, though." Remus said, on an exhale.

"What?"

"A dark creature, like you said."

"Moony, no..."

"Yep," Remus nodded, gazing out at the fields before them, and the motorway behind that. "So when you talk about wanting to prove yourself, I *do* understand what you mean. People trust werewolves just about as much as they trust the disgraced sons of dark wizards."

"I do know. I didn't mean to act like..."

"Like you're the only one with a stake in this war?"

"Yeah, like that. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to."

"I know," Remus smiled, looking at him, finally. "I'm sorry about Regulus."

"Well." Sirius scuffed his feet in the gravel, "I already knew, pretty much. Of course he was there."

"I'm going to work so hard on this Slytherin prank when we get back to school. It'll be my best work."

Sirius laughed, an honest, abandoned noise, throwing his head back.

"Godric, Moony." He grinned broadly, "When you say things like that it makes me want to snog your face off."

"Ha," Remus snorted. He shot a look at James, inside the red phone box, jabbering away with a huge smile on his face, "Maybe not *just* yet..."

Sirius looked mournful again,

"I'm going to tell him, just not with all this bad stuff going on, you know?"

"I know." Remus nodded. He did. He didn't want Sirius to know it, but the idea of James finally finding out about them was much scarier than he had prepared himself for. Why shake everyone up again?

"Remus? If I ask you something, will you tell me the truth?"

"Ok." His stomach clenched involuntary, but he steeled himself.

"What was the note from James's dad? It wasn't a book title, was it?"

"No." Remus agreed, "It wasn't." He reached inside his pocket and pulled it out, thumbing the

soft, thick parchment for a moment before handing it over to Sirius.

Sirius unfolded it quickly and looked down.

“Hope Jenkins?” He read, a crease in his brow, “What does that mean?”

“It’s a name.” Remus said, quickly, “My mother’s name. And address.”

“Oh!” Sirius breathed, re-reading it, still frowning. “Your *mother*.” He said the word as if he had never even considered the possibility that Remus had such a thing.

“Yeah,” Remus took the parchment back, shoving it back into his pocket. “I know we said we would talk about anything but mothers, but. Well. Dumbledore gave me a letter she’d written me, back after Lyall died. She said I could try to find her, when I was of age, so... Mr Potter found her, I s’pose.”

“What are you going to do with it? Write to her?”

“Yeah I think I will.”

Sirius moved his hand on the fence, subtly brushing Remus’s fingers.

“Well. I hope you find her.”

* * *

Mr Potter had been right – for the next few days, the house was busier than Remus had seen it since the Christmas party of ’73. Except, of course, there was very little cheer. These were the people closest to Dumbledore – many of them were working for the ministry, but all of them were loyal to him before anything else. They were the front line in the war effort.

Some of them were familiar faces – Moody, of course, who usually spared the time to cast a gruff nod at the three teenaged boys who were now spending their days watching the fireplace for new arrivals. Then there was Frank Longbottom himself, just as pleasant and good natured as Remus remembered. He came through most often with his girlfriend, Alice, the young woman who had ushered Sirius and Remus back on the day of the attack.

The Prewett twins were another surprise – James and Sirius were falling over themselves to catch up with them, and share every nefarious act they had committed at Hogwarts since the older boys’ departure. They had both grown very handsome, broad shouldered and rougher round the edges from a few adventures – but they still had their same easy tempers and wicked sense of humour. Often they brought their red-haired sister, and her equally flame-haired husband.

All of these guests only stopped to chat a few moments to James, Remus and Sirius, before vanishing into Mr Potter’s study, or else heading out into the garden to apparate (apparently Moody had placed a charm over the Potters’ house making it not only unplottable, but impossible to place an apparition trace on). As a consequence, the living room and entrance hall began to feel very much like platform 9 ¾.

In the evening’s, Mrs Potter would come home, looking worn out and determined. She would still have a smile for everyone, and be ready to host whoever was in the house for supper. She was nothing sort of spectacular.

The night before the boys were expected to return to Hogwarts, Moody, Frank and Alice were joining them for dinner – beef stew with dumplings. They were having a very pleasant evening,

Frank and Remus were having a very intense discussion about defensive charms, and Alice and the boys (including Fleamont) were arguing over which quidditch team was going to win the league.

To Remus's left, Moody leaned over to address Mrs Potter, and whispered,

"I hear Ferox is getting out, tomorrow?"

"Getting out?!" Remus spun around, cutting Frank off mid-flow, "Getting out of where?"

Moody raised an eyebrow, making his eerie magical eye bulge grotesquely,

"Bloody good hearing you've got, lad. Make a good auror."

Remus shook his head impatiently,

"Professor Ferox?"

"Yes, dear," Euphemia explained, calmly, "Leo Ferox was injured in the attack on Diagon Alley. He's now stable, and will be going to stay with his grandmother for a while to recuperate fully. I'm sorry, I quite forgot he taught at Hogwarts, did you know him well?"

"Sort of. He was my favourite teacher," Remus said, his insides churning. "Is he... what happened? Was he in one of the shops?"

"He was on the ground, in the battle with us," Frank said, "He was in the thick of it, you couldn't fault his technique, he was firing spells better than anyone, but we all get unlucky sometimes."

"But he'll be all right?" Remus put down his fork now, he wasn't going to eat any more.

"With proper rest." Mrs Potter nodded, smiling wanly.

All of the terror Remus had been trying to ignore for the past few days came crashing back. He gripped the seat of his chair and stared at his plate and thought about Ferox, lying unconscious in the rubble. A good, strong man like that, shot down. Remus felt a stab of angry defiance in his gut, sharpening his focus. He was going to do better, no matter what it took. He was going to be quicker; braver. The next time the battle came to him, he would be ready.

Seventh Year: Responsibilities

Monday 9th January 1978

Remus wrote three letters on his last night before school that Christmas break. Two would need a muggle stamp, and were to be posted into the red Royal Mail pillar box at the end of the road before they left for King's Cross. The second could wait until he got to Hogwarts, and could use one of the school owls.

The first was to Hope:

Dear Ms. Jenkins,

My name is Remus Lupin. My father was Lyall Lupin, and I believe I am your son.

I am now seventeen years old. I was given a letter written by you in 1965. I hope that you do not mind my writing to you. If you would like to write back, I would like that very much.

Yours Sincerely,

Remus John Lupin.

(He thought he had better sign off with his full name, though he would be very surprised if there was another Remus Lupin living in Britain. He also thought it best to keep it short and to the point. She would appreciate that, maybe, if she chose to ignore the letter.)

The second letter was to Grant.

Dear Grant,

I hope you had a nice Christmas. I wish I could have come to visit, but I stayed with my friend's family and it's hard to get away.

I hope you're all right. How's the job going? Have you saved up for a flat, yet? I'll have to start thinking about that soon. It's my last term of school, ever, and by June I will be living in the real world. I hope I can see you then.

Please write back as soon as you can, and let me know how you are doing.

Yours,

Remus.

(He didn't want to put 'yours sincerely', because it seemed silly and over-formal. He didn't want to put 'love', because that seemed very extreme. So in the end, 'yours', seemed the simplest, and most honest way to put it.)

“So it’s just the Ferox letter still to post, then?” Sirius asked, as they took their seat in their usual carriage on the Hogwarts Express. They were completely alone – Peter had gone in search of Dorcas, who had apparently written him a very steamy letter over the Christmas break, while James and Lily had made a beeline for the prefect’s carriage.

“Just the Ferox one.” Remus nodded, patting his pocket. Sirius sat on the same bench as him, reclining back and stretching his legs out in Remus’s lap, arms folded behind his head. Remus snorted indulgently, “Make yourself comfortable, why don’t you.”

“Don’t mind if I do.” Sirius grinned wickedly. “So.” He said, “Which letter are you most looking forward to getting a reply from?”

“Which reply am I *most* looking forward to?” Remus quirked an eyebrow dryly, “You mean between my battle-wounded ex-teacher, my young-offender ex-boyfriend or the mother who abandoned me?”

“Well, when you put it like *that*,” Sirius tutted. “Honestly, the amount of stuff you keep back.”

“Would you rather I was whinging all the time?” Remus sighed, opening the book he’d brought for the journey on top of Sirius’s legs.

“No,” Sirius mused, staring up at the carriage ceiling thoughtfully. “But, I mean. If you didn’t have *me* to talk to about this stuff, I’d be worried your head would explode.”

“It would not *explode*, thank you very much,” Remus slapped his knee lightly with the orange-covered penguin paperback. “You’re so dramatic. I coped perfectly well before you decided to involve yourself.”

“How?!”

“Well.” Remus chewed his lip, “I er... you’ll think it’s stupid.”

“What?”

“I... make lists, in my head. Benefits and losses. And sometimes I have pretend conversations, you know, to help me work through a problem...”

“Bloody hell, Moony,” Sirius sat up, spluttering. “You complete nutter.”

Remus laughed,

“Yeah, ok. Maybe a bit mental.”

Sirius slid his feet off Remus’s lap and sidled up to him on the seat,

“Ever had an imaginary conversation with me?”

“No!” Remus replied, closing his eyes as he felt Sirius’s breath on his neck. “I only have imaginary conversations with sensible people.”

“Well maybe that’s where you’re going wrong...” Sirius began to kiss Remus, very lightly just behind his earlobe. Remus squirmed, the book dropped to the carriage floor.

Suddenly, the door began to rattle open, and giggles could be heard in the corridor. Sirius and

Remus leapt apart just as Marlene and another girl stumbled inside,

“Oh!” Marlene’s eyes widened in surprise, cheeks turning pink, “Thought this car was empty...”

“Nope,” Sirius leaned back, looking amused. He was eyeing Marlene with a very wicked glint in his eye. He winked at the girl coming in behind her, a tall, dark haired sixth year Remus thought he vaguely recognised. “Patel.” Sirius nodded.

Oh god, Remus thought to himself, *could Sirius possibly have old conquests I don’t even know about?!*

“Remus, have you met Yasmin?” Marlene asked, taking a seat opposite him, “She’s the new Keeper.”

“Oh, right, hiya.” Remus nodded, giving an awkward wave.

“No Mary?” Sirius was raising an eyebrow at Marlene, as if he knew something. Remus was just confused and a bit flustered.

“No Mary.” Yasmin answered, with a similar smirk.

“She’s talking to one of the Ravenclaw prefects,” Marlene said, quickly, “It’s not as if we’re deliberately avoiding her or anything!” Marlene looked... was she *blushing* ?! Why was everybody acting so oddly? Remus shifted in his seat, noting the weird atmosphere.

“Hm.” Sirius said, still smiling at Marlene smugly, “What were *you two* up to, then?”

Yasmin tutted, and looked him dead in the eye with a wry smile of her own.

“Nothing. What were *you two* up to?” She raised a suggestive eyebrow and Remus nearly leapt up with shock. She *knew* ?! Just who *was* this Yasmin person, then?

“Nothing!” Sirius sat up straight.

“Well then.” Marlene shrugged, her face clearing as she settled back in her seat looking like she had just won a particularly rewarding game of chess. “We’ll leave it at that, then, shall we?”

“Fine.” Sirius leaned back too, folding his arms. Yasmin giggled, and Remus just scratched his head.

“*What* are we leaving *where* ?” He asked Sirius, later that evening. They were making their way slowly up to the owlery before curfew. He’d eaten a lot at dinner, and was somewhat regretting it, now.

“Moony, really.” Sirius laughed, “Someone as observant as you hasn’t noticed anything different about Marlene, lately?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” He panted, struggling as always with the spiral staircase.

Remus didn’t want to admit that if he *was* observant, it was only Sirius he was observing. He typically regarded the girls as a complete mystery, and rarely had any idea what was going on with them unless they explicitly told him. Lily and Mary did this more often than Marlene, who had always been as private as he was.

“Oh come *on* , Moony,” Sirius laughed, “Marlene and Yaz? Don’t tell me you didn’t see - they were all over each other before they realised the carriage wasn’t empty.”

Remus stopped - partly because he needed a moment to catch his breath, partly because he couldn't believe what Sirius was saying.

"You mean, *Marlene* is...?"

"Yep."

"And *Yasmin* ..."

"Yep."

"Bloody hell."

"Yep." Sirius's eyes were glittering mischievously. "Can't believe you hadn't figured it out already!"

"Well." Remus huffed. They were nearly at the top, now. "I'm pretty impressed that *you did* . Seeing as you apparently had no idea about me, after we'd been shagging for a year."

"It wasn't a *whole* year." Sirius replied, defensively, reaching the top and looking around furtively, before continuing into the empty room.

Remus came in behind him, and looked for an appropriate owl. It wasn't a long journey, he didn't think. He seemed to remember Ferox telling him that his grandmother lived in Liverpool. It had been a difficult letter to write, but necessary, considering they had last parted on difficult terms. He simply hoped Ferox was well, and added in a few inconsequential details about his NEWT preparation.

"So if Marlene knows..." Remus said, thoughtfully, tying the letter to his chosen owl's leg.

"Yeah, I know. James next." Sirius sighed.

"I don't mean to keep bringing it up..." Remus said, apologetically, setting the owl free to fly out of the nearest window. He watched it go.

"No, I promised I would do it." Sirius threw up his hands. "Anyway, this term's going to be enough of a nightmare what with NEWTs and the war... rather not have anything else to worry about."

"Are you nervous?"

"Shitting myself."

"Lovely." Remus rolled his eyes, "Can I help?"

"Not if you're going to suggest me having an imaginary conversation with Prongs..."

"Don't see why not," Remus shrugged. "Prongs is easy to do. Nice and predictable."

"Mm, unlike some." Sirius murmured. "Anyway, it's not what he'll say that I'm worried about. I know what he'll say. It'll be like it was when you... um..."

"...came out..." Remus prompted, helpfully. Sirius nodded, bashfully.

"I know he'll be his usual righteous self. I'm more worried about the stuff he *doesn't* say..."

"Well." Remus said, turning away from the window, "There's nothing you can do about that."

“Black?! Bla-aaack? Oi, Padfoot!” Sirius's pocket began shouting at him. Sirius grinned, fishing out his compact mirror and opening it,

“Speak of the devil.”

“Where are you, tosser?” James’s voice boomed out of the mirror.

“Owlery.”

“Moony with you?”

“Yep.”

“Dumbledore wants him.”

“Right now?!” Sirius glanced up at Remus, whose stomach sank. This was never good.

* * *

One hour later

Remus was not surprised to find all three marauders (and Lily - who by this point may as well have her own nickname and access to the map, anyway) waiting outside of Dumbledore’s office for him. He was grateful - he was in such a state that if he’d had to walk back to the tower alone he’d probably have got lost.

“Well?” Sirius asked, eager as always to be the first to know.

“Um.” Said Remus.

“Come on,” Lily said, taking his arm gently, “You don’t have to tell us, we just wanted to know you’re ok.”

“Of course he has to tell us.” Sirius frowned. Remus gave him a warning glance.

“Can we go somewhere a bit more private? Not the common room...”

“Dorm room?” Peter suggested.

“Yeah.” Remus nodded.

He wouldn’t speak to them until they got there, and used the time to work out exactly how he was going to explain without hurting at least Sirius’s feelings, never mind wounding James’s pride. Dumbledore hadn’t said he couldn’t tell anyone. Only to exercise caution with who he told. *For your safety, and theirs*, the old man had cautioned ominously. Remus still had serious doubts about whether or not Dumbledore was all that concerned for his safety, personally, but kept his mouth shut. You had to be careful what you said, in Remus’s position.

Finally, they all piled into the marauder’s dorm room - even Lily, which was a bit weird, especially when she sat herself down on James’s bed, as if she had done it a hundred times before. Remus sat on the lid of his trunk. Hadn’t even had time to unpack, yet.

“So?!” Sirius asked again, impatient, leaning against his bedpost, “What did Dumbledore want?”

“He gave me an assignment.” Remus stared at the worn out rug as he said this, not meeting anyone’s eyes. He still couldn’t quite believe it himself.

“He what?!” James surprised Remus by speaking first. “He gave *you* ... not any of us?”

“James,” Lily said, sharply, touching her boyfriend’s arm, “It’s obviously something Remus is best suited for.”

“Werewolves.” Sirius said. Remus looked up and met his eye. He looked upset, so Remus smiled.

“Yeah. Done it before, haven’t I?”

“You’ve done...” Lily started, then shook her head, as if thinking better of it. “What does he need from you? Why now?”

“They think there’s one in Hogsmeade,” Remus explained, slowly, “The centaurs told him, or something.” (He was foggy on those details, because when Dumbledore had been explaining it Remus had been trying very hard not to throw up from nerves), “Dumbledore wants me to um... ‘make my presence known,’ next time I’m in town. See if it... er... takes the bait.”

“*Bait* ?!” Sirius practically shouted.

“...It’s just an expression.” Remus replied.

“Not a great one,” Peter said, nervously, chewing his nails.

“Sorry.” Remus shrugged. “Don’t worry about me. If there *is* a werewolf, and it’s one of Greyback’s, then I don’t think I’m in any danger. He wants me to join him, remember?”

“Yeah, I remember getting my *own* invitation to join that side.” Sirius said, with a shiver. Remus wished he hadn’t brought that up. The last image he needed in his head right now was Sirius’s unconscious body falling out of the Potters’ fireplace on that horrible night.

“It’s not going to be like that.” He said, stiffly. “Nothing might happen at all, they might not even be here for me. And I was ok, last time, wasn’t I?”

“Only because Ferox showed up!” Sirius had forgotten that they weren’t alone, he was gearing up for a proper row.

“I know, but I’m of age, now... I’ll know what to expect.” Remus tried to keep his own voice placid, hoping it would remind Sirius to keep himself in check.

“It’s so dangerous, Remus!” Lily started/

“I know that too, but I wasn’t exactly given a choice!” He snapped. She lowered her head and pursed her lips. He hadn’t meant to raise his voice to her, but he’d have to feel bad about it later. Just now it was too much to ask.

“When?” Sirius asked, calmer than before.

“Next Hogsmeade weekend.”

“That’s in two weeks.” James said, “After the next moon...”

“They’re going to increase security in the village, obviously.” Remus said. “After last time.”

“Ok, I’m going to need a few things explained, here...” Lily said, a deep crease in her forehead.

“James, would you?” Remus pleaded, “I think I just want to go to bed...”

“Yeah, of course.” James nodded, springing into action at once. “We can talk about this tomorrow, when everyone’s had some time.”

“Thanks.” Remus smiled, weakly, getting up, thinking to go and brush his teeth, looking forward to being alone in the bathroom for a few minutes to collect himself.

“Moony?” James said quickly, as the others got up, “I didn’t mean that you shouldn’t get an assignment, or that you can’t do it, or anything--”

“I know,” Remus nodded, patting him on the shoulder. “Believe me, if you or Sirius could do it instead, I wouldn’t be Dumbledore’s first pick. S’pose I just got lucky, eh?”

Inside the locked bathroom, he pressed his back against the door, and tried to regulate his breathing. Now that his friends knew, it all became much more real to him. The thought that had been gnawing away at him since Dumbledore had first described the task finally sank in. *You never actually thought he would ask this.* Remus chastised himself, *you never really believed you would be useful. Be careful what you wish for, Loony Lupin.*

Dizzy and trembling, he now pressed his ear to the bathroom door. They had all left the room. All but one. He wrenched the door open without a second thought, and stood face to face with Sirius.

“You ok?” Sirius asked, his cool blue eyes full of concern. Remus shook his head.

“No.”

Sirius reached out, and Remus clung to him.

Seventh Year: Preparation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Strange it is to be beside you, many years and tables turned

You'd probably not believe me if told you all I've learned

And it is very very weird, indeed

To hear words like "forever" plead

Those ships run through my mind I cannot cheat

It's like looking in the teacher's face complete

I can say nothing to you but repeat

what I heard;

That love is just a four letter word.

Tuesday 9th January 1978

“Right, Moony,” James marched into the great hall the next morning carrying a pile of books he could barely see over. He slammed them all down on the breakfast table in front of Remus, disrupting the porridge he had been picking at. He didn’t have much of an appetite, somehow.

“What are these?” He reached over to pick up the nearest book. *Advanced Defensive Spells*.

“Potter,” Lily straightened her back, staring over the pile with a look of bemusement, “Have you been in the *library* ?! In the morning?! Instead of *flying* ?!”

“We need to get Moony *prepared* , Lily!”

“But... you said mornings were sacred to you!” Sirius said.

“You said you had to pay homage to the gods of the quidditch pitch!” Peter grinned.

“I can miss *one* morning.” James said, dismissively.

“Prongs!” Remus grabbed his hand, and gushed at him dramatically, “I’m *touched* .”

“Gerrof,” James snatched his hand back, ears turning bright red. “You can all stop making fun of me. Am I the only one taking this seriously?!”

“Hey!” Sirius smirked. Remus and Peter groaned in anticipation of what was coming, “I am *always* *Sirius*. ”

Peter and Remus covered their eyes in embarrassment, but it must have been the first time Lily had ever heard that joke because she snorted with laughter so suddenly that her tea shot out of her nose. This was the funniest thing that even the marauders had seen in ages, and they were all hysterical

for a good five minutes - each time any of them managed to stop, Lily would snort again, or James would waggle his eyebrows and they would be helpless with laughter once more.

When they'd finally calmed down, Remus opened the first book eagerly and decided that he *would* eat his porridge after all.

They went to their lessons with a new sense of purpose, and James suggested that they all meet in the library after the last bell to begin work on preparing Remus for whatever was ahead. They did this every day for a whole week, commandeering a block of six desks behind some stacks in a corner, where they could have complete privacy, pushed them all together and covered the thing in textbooks on battle theory, duelling techniques, defensive incantations and hexes. Peter even made a threatening sign which read *Marauder's War Council: Do Not Disturb*, which worked like a charm (possibly because it had been literally charmed by Lily) and meant they could leave their work there and return to it whenever they liked.

Remus abandoned his study groups, asking Christopher to take over, James nominated Marlene to take over two of his quidditch sessions, and even Lily stopped going to Slug Club meetings that week. (Though she did try to break into Slughorn's study to get her hands on some Felix Felicis for Remus, but had no luck and was almost caught). In short, all five of them spent as much time as possible working towards the same cause; preparing Remus for his mission.

He had been teasing James before, but Remus really was touched - only there was hardly any time to dwell on it, as they all knuckled down to study harder than any of them ever had before. Remus just thanked his lucky stars that James was so good at defense against the dark arts; they'd never had a teacher stay longer than a year in that subject, so Remus's own knowledge was patchy. James and Lily's combined efforts helped him cover more ground in a week than he had since his OWLs.

"You're good at charms, and that's half the battle." James said, appraisingly, as they stood in the empty common room one evening, "The rest is really just quick thinking and determination."

"And we *know* you can do those." Lily encouraged, tidying up the mess they'd made trying to freeze sofa cushions mid-air.

"It won't be like Diagon Alley," Sirius reassured him, slapping him on the back, "Because you'll know what's coming. You've got time to get ready."

"Easy enough to say..." Remus bit his lip. "I'm ok at most of this, here, with you lot, but if I was actually defending myself... and I *still* can't do a patronus."

"Don't worry about that, now, just focus on the simpler stuff." James advised, rubbing his chin, "The patronus will come - it's not as if you're not strong enough; you apparate like it's nothing."

"That's easy." Remus sighed. "That's just thinking. Patronuses are *feeling*."

"Could somebody please let me down, now?" Peter called from above their heads, where he had been paralysed mid-air.

* * *

Dear Remus,

Thank you for writing to me. My Christmas was good. I never had turkey before, it was nice.

No flat yet but I am trying. Still staying with my aunt as you will see from the address, but I like it here. I like the sea and may learn to swim.

I've been seeing a lad down here, but he ain't as clever as you. Nice body though.

I miss you very much.

Your Grant. xxx

* * *

Dear Remus,

Thank you for your letter, I was so pleased to hear from you.

I would like to begin by assuring you that I am quite well following the events in Diagon Alley over Christmas. I was sorry to hear that you and your friends were there too - I had hoped the war would be long over by the time you were ready to leave school.

I will be staying with my grandmother for a while longer. but expect to be back to work no later than Easter. I've no doubt you will understand why I can't say any more than that.

Best of luck with the NEWTs.

L. Ferox.

* * *

Sunday 15th January 1978

By the following weekend, they had definitely hit their stride, and Remus was feeling more confident than ever - as long as he didn't think too much about Livia's incredible ability with wandless magic. He tried to convince himself that he was *over*-prepared, if anything. that Dumbledore had merely required him to show his face in Hogsmeade, to see if this other wolf (if there even was another wolf) sniffed him out. He might never use anything James had taught him at all.

Yeah, right - that nasty voice in the back of his head spoke; always late at night, when everyone else was asleep and he was most alone - *as if you've ever been that lucky.*

They spent all day Saturday in the library, all five of them, but on Sunday Lily was required mediate a prefect dispute and Peter had an afternoon detention for poor uniform, so for a good portion of the day it was just Remus, James and Sirius working in their quiet little study nook.

Sirius and James were on the blacklist for the restricted section, so Remus went in alone, and came back with the biggest book on curses he could find.

"There are some second years on the other side of the hall taking bets on whether we're really behind studying for NEWTs or just planning the most amazing prank Hogwarts has ever seen." He said, setting the huge tome down on top of three more.

"I'm so proud of our legacy, aren't you, Mr Prongs?" Sirius smirked over the book he was taking notes from.

"Quite so, Mr Padfoot, quite so." James replied, scanning a glossary. "Ah ha!" He grabbed a book triumphantly, and began flipping pages.

Sirius looked up.

"Found something good?"

"Maybe..." James murmured, reading fast.

Remus began to look at the contents of the book of curses. The chapter titles were truly horrible, and he hoped he'd never actually have to use any of this stuff.

"Ok," James said, "Look at this." He had finished reading, and flipped the book to show Remus and Sirius, who were on the other side of the table. "I really think this sort of thing plays to your strengths, Moony. It's all intuitive stuff with a lot of punch behind it, the way you do pranks."

Sirius and Remus both stood to pour over the book, leaning forward on the desk. Remus's shoulders were still so sore from the last moon - the pain-free days between moons seemed to be getting shorter the older he got; his tendons felt like hard knotted rope rubbing against the bone. He stretched to rub a particularly sore spot while he read, pressing down with his fingertips and breathing in slightly at the pain.

Sirius moved closer, and - perhaps without thinking - reached out to rub the sore spot with his own long fingers. He was much better at it than Remus, who felt a wave of relief as Sirius worked small, soothing circles into his muscle. He sighed, tiredly.

Remus was the first to finish reading, and looked up at James. The bespectacled young man was not looking at the text, though. He was staring at them, across the table. Specifically at the point where Sirius's hand was touching Remus's neck. James's mouth had fallen slightly open, and there was a question in his eyes.

Remus moved to alert Sirius, who finally looked up at his friend. Seeing immediately what he had done, he just stared back, still for a moment. Remus half expected him to step away, withdraw his hand. But he didn't. Instead, Sirius wrapped his arm around Remus's shoulders, and squeezed him, very deliberately, all the while holding James's gaze.

James closed his mouth, looked at them both again, and nodded, wordlessly. Remus straightened up, letting Sirius's arm drop.

He had to leave them alone, that much was obvious. He cleared his throat,

"Er. I'm sure there's a book I've read which goes into more depth than this. I think I've got a copy upstairs, I'll er... just go and get it... see you in an hour or so, maybe?"

Sirius and James nodded, still staring at each other. Remus left, quickly, glad the library was almost empty. He felt hot and cold all over, a feeling similar to guilt, even though he knew he ought not to feel it. Halfway to the tower, he bumped into Lily,

"Hiya, Moony," she grinned, "Seen Potter?"

"Library," Remus said, "But I... wouldn't, if I were you. He and Sirius are having a chat."

“Oh, I can interrupt a chat...” she started off. Remus touched her arm quickly,

“Lily, no.” He bit his lip, “Sorry, but I really think you ought to give them a bit of time. Sirius really needs it, ok?”

“What’s happened?!” Lily looked startled by his seriousness.

Remus sighed, heavily. Well, she was about to find out, anyway, and it was as much his his to tell as it was Sirius’s.

“Um... come with me, shall we go outside?”

“Ok...” Lily followed him, looking curious and concerned at the same time, a little crease forming in her freckled brow.

Outside in the crisp winter sunshine everything seemed a bit cheerier. Remus steeled himself, stomach roiling. He had to keep reminding himself that he’d been wanting this; to have it all out in the open. Only now, it seemed utterly terrifying. They wandered towards the lake. Remus gazed across the surface, squinting against the reflected shards of dazzling light.

“Remus?” Lily asked, “You’re making me nervous!”

“Sorry!” He blinked, “Er... it’s about me and Sirius.”

“You and Sirius? Oh no, what have you done? Only you two could get in trouble during *the first week back*. ”

“No, it’s nothing like that!” Remus laughed, despite himself. He rubbed the back of his head, casting around for the right words, “Look, you know how you’re always saying I should... find someone?”

“Yeah...” Lily frowned again, searching his face.

Remus raised his eyebrows, waiting for her to get there. It took longer than he’d expected, but her eyes widened suddenly. “Oh my god!”

She covered her mouth with her hands and sat down rather suddenly on the nearby stone bench. Remus sat beside her, slowly, his joints stiff. “Sirius?!” She said.

“Sirius.” He nodded.

“Oh my god.”

“Yeah... sorry.”

“No, Remus, don’t be sorry, I just... wow, ok, give me a minute.”

He did, waiting patiently, looking out at the lake. He didn’t look at her, because it didn’t matter. Lily would be ok, Lily would take it in her stride.

“And he feels the same way? You’re *sure* , Remus?”

“Couldn’t be surer.” Remus smiled - it was suddenly very easy to smile. He pulled his cloak and the neck of his jumper aside covertly, to show her the reddish-purple bruise Sirius’s mouth had left there a few nights before.

“Oh my god!” She said again. He covered it up, blushing, but still smiling. “Does James know?”

“He’s finding out right now. That’s why I wanted you to give them a bit of space.”

“Yeah, no, of course.” She nodded, “I understand.”

“I’ve wanted to tell you for ages.”

“Ages? How long has it been...?”

“Since the summer. Well. It got serious over the summer. But... we were um... well there was stuff going on for a while before that. Since Sirius broke up with Mary.”

“Bloody hell.” She shook her head again. “So, what? Sirius is your boyfriend? Are you *in love* with him?”

“Woah,” Remus blinked, shuffling away, “I mean, steady on! Let’s just um... look it’s out now and that’s plenty.”

Lily gave him a very long, appraising stare. Then she nodded.

“All right then.”

Remus raised his eyebrows.

“All right then?!”

“You said it’s serious, though. He’s not just... um... it’s not just messing about?”

“No. Definitely not. I know it’s unexpected...”

Lily shook her head and looked at him with big, earnest eyes.

“Are you happy?”

“Yes.” Without hesitation.

“All right, then.” She said, briskly, back to her sensible self. She leaned over and kissed his cheek. “Look, I didn’t take divination, because it’s bollocks, but I’m pretty sure we’re all in for a really crap time quite soon.”

“My god, you sound more like James every day, it’s ridiculous.” Remus snorted. She slapped his knee, lightly,

“Listen to me! It’s going to be *hard*. And it’s happening faster than I thought it would. It’s going to be scary, all the time, for a *long* time. But if we can keep being happy together, and making *each other* happy... then good. Brilliant. If it’s Sirius for you, and you for him, then brilliant.”

“Jesus, Evans.” Remus buried his face in her hair, pulling her into a huge hug.

* * *

Lily and Remus waited another half an hour or so before returning to the library, where they found that the books had all been taken out, and James and Sirius were gone. Remus didn’t have the map on him, but fortunately Lily knew James, and they headed straight for the quidditch pitch.

Sure enough, two familiar figures were racing through the air between the goalposts on their brooms. James was winning, but not by much - Remus could tell by Sirius's posture that he was pushing as hard as he could - he hadn't seen him concentrating like that on flying since being kicked off the team.

Lily and Remus sat, companionably in the lower stands, and waited, rehearsing a few basic defense spells.

"So last time I met a werewolf--" Remus was saying.

"I still can't believe that happened..." Lily shook her head, amazed.

--Ferox showed up and fired some silver chains at her, so she apparated pretty quick. I could try that, but I'm only *ok* at transfiguration, and what if the silver backfires and gets me?"

"There might be a potion that helps with your silver problem" Lily chewed her quill, "I'll ask Slughorn. But otherwise it might not be worth the risk."

"Fair enough..."

THUD, THUD. Two sets of heavy boots landed before them. James and Sirius stood panting and sweating, both clutching their brooms. Lily twirled her hair around her finger and tilted her head, and Remus fought not to do the same.

"All right, lads?" She broke the ice. They nodded.

"Needed a break." Sirius explained, apologetically. "Change of scenery."

Remus looked up at James, nervously.

"All right, Prongs?" He asked, just managing to keep the tremor out of his voice.

James looked at Sirius, then down at Remus. He shook his head, looking down, and reached an arm out, yanking Remus to his feet,

"Come here you big prat," he boomed, enveloping him in a bear hug.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Love is just a Four Letter Word' by Bob Dylan but famously (and perfectly) performed by Joan Baez.

Seventh Year: Instinct

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“You *told* him!” Remus kissed Sirius as soon as they were alone.

“Well, he worked it out...” Sirius said, laughing, as he was pushed backwards into their bedroom. Lily and James had to head a prefect’s meeting and Peter was still in detention. Remus had dragged Sirius upstairs as fast as he could, all aches and pains forgotten.

“But you *told* him.” Remus insisted, running his tongue up Sirius’s neck, collarbone to earlobe. Sirius shuddered and the backs of his knees hit the bed frame. Remus gave him a shove that was half urgent, half playful, and they fell back together.

“Merlin,” Sirius gasped, as Remus continued his assault, climbing on top of him, a knee either side of Sirius’s hips, “If I’d known this was how you’d respond, I’d have told Prongs ages ag--”

“Shut. up.” Remus kissed him hard on the lips, hands on Sirius’s belt. Sirius obeyed.

Remus was a bit surprised, too. Who’d have thought that confession was such a turn on? If he wasn’t careful, he’d be telling everyone he met.

“So,” he said, half an hour later, sitting by the window in his boxers, lighting a cigarette. Sirius lay on the bed, still, vaguely stunned and staring at him. “It went well?”

“Hm?!” Sirius blinked very slowly, as if his eyelids were heavy. Remus grinned, exhaling smoke, trying to aim it through the crack in the window,

“*James* . What did he say?!”

“I think the first thing was ‘what the fuck are you playing at’, but it got better from there.” Sirius snorted.

“Did he ask lots of questions?”

“Sort of. Nothing I didn’t expect, I s’pose. What about Evans?”

“She said ‘oh my god’ about a hundred times, but she came around fairly quickly.”

“Prongs too. Except the prat won’t tell Wormtail for us, says we have to do it.”

“Well. Fair enough.” Remus sucked on his cigarette again, then blew smoke into the room, watching it fill the space between them. “What questions did he ask?”

Sirius closed his eyes, breathing in.

“Nothing scandalous. How long for, when did it start, why didn’t I tell him... that sort of thing.”

“What did you say?”

“I told the truth. Roll us a fag?”

Remus already had. He held it out. Sirius rolled onto his stomach and reached his long pale arm

through the smoke to take it, placed it between his pursed lips and snapped his fingers. He sucked, then rolled back, exhaling with a sigh.

“How’d you feel?” Remus asked, unable to tear his eyes away. It still seemed miraculous beyond belief. *Sirius Black, naked, in my bloody bed* .

“Right now? Bloomin’ marvellous.” Sirius winked, wickedly. “About Prongs? Ok. Good, I think.” He stretched, hand disappearing under one of the pillows. “What’s this?”

“Oh!” Remus blushed, jumping up from the window, “I got some letters back. Ferox is ok. And, erm...”

“Grant.” Sirius’s lip curled as he picked up the postcard Grant had sent from Brighton. It had a colour photo of the pier on the front, the sea looked blue and the sun was shining. Remus was so glad he had sent it. It was nice to picture Grant in a bright, cheerful place like that. Sirius continued smoking as he read it. “He’s seeing someone with a nice body but he misses you?!”

Remus jumped onto the bed and snatched the card away, raising it aloft so Sirius couldn’t reach.

“He’s seeing someone with a nice body *and* he misses me. Separate statements.”

“Well.” Sirius folded his arms, lying back again, stiff puffing, “I hope you’re writing to him about *my* gorgeous body.”

“Of course.” Remus laughed, laying back down beside him. They stared up at the red velvet bed curtains together. “You’re not really jealous, are you?” Remus asked, tentatively.

“Pfft, no.” Sirius nudged him gently with his elbow. “Curious, maybe...”

“About...?”

“What do you think? You and him! You’ve never told me any detail...”

“We were fifteen, there *was* no detail. Just snogging.” Remus tutted, “Honestly, what a thing to ask.”

“James did, about us.”

“He never!”

“Well, he didn’t, but I knew he *wanted* to.”

“No he didn’t, you’re just being vain.” Remus leaned over to stub out his cigarette in the cold cup of tea on his nightstand. Sirius caught him at the hip and pulled him over. Remus closed his eyes and let himself be pulled.

---“Thank Godric I had the map, I would have gone to the libr--MERLIN’S BALLS!” The door flew open and Peter stood gaping in the doorway, clapping his hands to his eyes.

Remus leapt up from the bed as if Sirius was on fire, and began scrabbling about for his trousers on the floor, shouting,

“Sorry Pete, sorry Pete! Shit! Shit! Shit!”

“What the fuck?!” Peter shouted back, still covering his eyes.

Sirius yanked the duvet up, staring at them both, then burst out laughing,

“Wormy, we’ve got something to tell you.”

* * *

Friday 20th January 1978

Peter took a little while to get used to it, but then they all did, really - even Remus and Sirius. They kept forgetting that the marauders knew, and they’d grown so used to consciously avoiding each other that they were oddly shy to show any sort of affection in front of the others. Of course, Remus kept reminding himself, it was better to keep a low profile anyway; they still had the rest of the school to worry about.

“You could tell Christopher, though,” Sirius said, as they left the library for the last time before the Hogsmeade trip. It was almost midnight and they’d had to be chased out by Madam Pince, who wouldn’t let them stay any longer, even when Lily and James had flashed their Head Girl and Boy badges.

“Oh, *now* you remember his name,” Remus yawned, clutching his books to his chest - really just for something to hold on to.

“I’m just *saying*,” Sirius caught the yawn and covered his mouth, but continued speaking, “He already knows half of it, no harm telling him the rest. Not really fair to let him keep pining away for you when there’s not a chance in--”

“Sirius Black, are you jealous?!” Lily cackled, giggly with overtiredness.

“No.” Sirius sniffed, nose in the air, “I just don’t want any misunderstandings.”

“Well if I survive tomorrow then I’ll think about it.” Remus yawned again.

That made everyone go quiet and he regretted saying it. They walked back to the common room in solemn silence. Gryffindor tower was peaceful and mostly empty - a few stray second years up past their curfew fled to their dorms as soon as they saw James and Lily, and the marauders took their usual seats by the fireplace. Remus settled into his armchair and immediately returned to the book he had been reading before Pince had so rudely interrupted.

Sirius flicked his wand at the kettle hanging over the fireplace and Lily summoned some clean tea cups from the cupboard, but still no one spoke until the water was boiled and the tea brewing in its pot.

“Moony,” Sirius said, softly, “Put down the book, eh? We’ve done so much already.”

“Doesn’t feel like enough.” Remus replied, feeling prickly and irritable. “I know I’m missing something.”

Everyone kept *staring* at him, and by now he didn’t know whether it was because they were amazed (or repulsed) about the whole Sirius thing, or whether they were convinced he was about to run away and join the werewolves.

“It’s loads.” James said, now pouring the tea and handing Remus a saucer, “Honestly, you know enough now to walk any Defence Against the Dark Arts exam. Might as well bunk off the rest of the year.”

“This isn't an exam.” Remus snapped. The cup and saucer shook in his hands, so he set it down on the arm of the chair. He had a feeling Sirius had noticed that, but hopefully no one else.

“But Moony,” Peter slurped his own tea noisily, “You’ve done this before. Last year.”

“Exactly,” James nodded, encouragingly.

Remus sighed, and said no more. What was the point; whinging wasn’t going to get him anywhere. He sipped his tea, willing his hand to stay steady. This was potentially the worst time of the month for a mission, he couldn’t help thinking. Only four nights away from the full moon and his magic felt stronger than usual, but also less predictable. He was restless, his skin crawling, his senses bare and his mood hot. He knew he was forgetting something. He just *knew*. A dark feeling of foreboding that told him all the curses in the world would be no good.

He stood up, sharply, knocking the teacup off the armchair. Sirius was quick, and stopped it mid-air with a flick of his wand. Remus ignored this.

“Going to bed.” He said, cracking his knuckles.

“Ok, Moony,” James nodded, brightly. He glanced at Lily, “Think we’ll stay down here for a bit.”

Peter looked at Sirius, and then Remus with an expression of faint terror. Remus tutted.

“It’s ok, Wormtail, I really am just going to sleep. See you all tomorrow.”

He didn’t sleep. His brain wouldn’t let him. He hated Dumbledore, and he hated Greyback, he hated the war, and as the hours got smaller and smaller, he hated Peter too.

He did not hate the other werewolf, though; the one who was not Greyback. Just as he had not hated Livia, though she frightened him. The more Remus thought about what was ahead of him, the less sure he was about his preparedness.

Yes, he knew more curses and hexes now than Regulus and Severus combined (probably), but the more he thought back to his encounter with Livia, the less useful these things seemed. Hadn’t she said it herself? “*You can wear that uniform and wave your silly stick, but you know that you have more in common with me than anyone in that castle.*” He knew she was stronger than him; she could hurt him if she wanted to - but she hadn’t, not really. Instead, he remembered the pity he had felt, immediately after their meeting. He remembered the desire to help her, and his conversations with both Ferox and Dumbledore.

As dawn broke, Remus lay wide awake, thinking at a million miles an hour, his heart hammering and his stomach fizzing with excited anticipation. If he had to go to war, then fine. But this was *his* battle, and it would be on his terms.

* * *

It was an April morning when they told us we should go

As I turned to you, you smiled at me

How could we say no?

Oh, the fun to have

To live the dreams we always had

Oh, the songs to sing

When we at last return again

Slipping off a glancing kiss

To those who claim they know

Below the streets that steam and hiss

The devil's in his hole

Saturday 21st January 1978

Breakfast that morning was a bleak affair. Remus was ravenously hungry, but no one else seemed to be eating. Sirius was on black coffee, and it was already making him jittery; he kept bobbing up and down in his seat. Mary and Marlene were the only ones acting halfway normal, because neither of them knew about the assignment.

“Three Broomsticks, later?” Mary asked, brightly.

Lily and James nodded, trying to smile, and succeeding only in looking slightly deranged. They were holding hands under the table again, and Remus was trying not to think about it, instead reaching for the plate of bacon for another helping.

“Can I bring Yaz?” Marlene was asking Mary. Mary raised an eyebrow,

“I mean, I *suppose* ...”

“Great.” Marlene grinned. Mary’s mouth twisted, but she didn’t say anything.

The walk into Hogsmeade seemed longer than ever. Fortunately Lily and James had duties to perform, so at least they weren’t following Remus about, just *waiting*. Unfortunately, Sirius had enough nervous energy for three people, and Remus could feel it coming off him in waves.

“Where shall we go?” He murmured, low enough so only Peter and Remus could hear.

“Everywhere, I s’pose.”

“Would it help if I was Padfoot?”

“If you like.”

“Shall I change too?” Peter asked.

“If you like.”

Remus was unable to summon up very much interest. He was too busy trying to work out whether or not Hogsmeade smelled genuinely different, or whether it was because he usually tried to ignore scents as a human.

They ducked into a shop alleyway and Peter and Sirius transformed behind some bins. Wormtail

crawled onto Remus's palm, and he sat him on his shoulder. The weight was a small comfort, even if his whiskers tickled Remus's neck. Nice to have Padfoot too, big and black and excitable, trotting alongside like a loyal companion. Yes. Much better when your friends aren't human, in Remus's opinion. At least, right now.

They walked. Remus deliberately avoided the highstreet, instead wandering around the backs of the houses. How many people lived in Hogsmeade? How many were potentially in danger, without even knowing it? He tried sniffing the air, and it was like exercising a muscle he had allowed to atrophy.

Some scents came through stronger than others. Padfoot, obviously, and Wormtail. Household waste from the bins, compost from back gardens, and magic - that heavy, iron taste which settled on his tongue like treacle when he was this close to the moon. Other students, the sickly sweet aroma of Honeyduke's and the comforting smell of parchment emanating from Scrivenshaft's.

The forest. He could smell the forest, if he really tried. He closed his eyes briefly and inhaled. Green, lush, dense, teeming with life... and magic. At first it seemed like an indulgent whim, just an idea that he rather liked the smell, and wanted to get closer. But the further they walked, and the closer they got, the more important it felt. Remus had the impression that something had been drawing him in this direction for some time now.

The Forbidden Forest loomed large over the little village, miles and miles of darkness and danger, against a backdrop of blue-grey snow capped mountains. For the first time (as a human, anyway) Remus had the urge to go in - to explore.

Padfoot whined beside him as they left Hogsmeade and the road behind them. He wondered if Sirius could smell it too, but it was impossible to get any kind of sense out of him in dog-form. Remus tried to switch off his rational mind for a moment - was there anything there at all, or was he just overthinking?

The magic in the forest wasn't the same as at Hogwarts; it wasn't human, it didn't have that metallic, gunpowder smell Remus had come to associate with most witches and wizards he knew. It was more organic; less precise; a heady, mulchy smell of soil and decay. There was power, in there. He knew this instinctively - dizzying, huge, earth moving power. It would have been frightening, once. But the closer Remus grew, the surer he was - the power was *his*, if he wanted it. All he needed to do was let it in. Another scent revealed itself; an animal; blood. Remus felt the wolf inside stir, and his desire to enter the forest grew almost impossible to resist.

Padfoot barked, sharply, and ran in front of him. The great black dog turned on Remus, raising its hackles and emitting a low growl. Remus blinked, snapping back into himself. Wormtail was speaking and quivering on his shoulder - maybe had been for a few minutes, now.

"Sirius." Remus frowned. "Move."

Padfoot continued to growl. Wormtail gave another squeak, before scuttling down Remus's robes into his left pocket. Remus felt hot and angry - as if something had been snatched from him that he wanted. That he *needed*. He made to move forward, and Sirius transformed back into himself.

"Where are you going?!" He said, still blocking Remus's way. "Can't you smell it?!"

Remus stopped trying to get past and caught Sirius's eye,

"Can you?" He whispered, not quite believing it.

"There's something bad in there. It must be the wolf."

"It is." Remus nodded, eagerly. Surely that was *obvious* ?!

"I can't be sure, though." Sirius frowned.

"I can." Remus replied. "Let me past."

Sirius moved again, blocking him.

"No." He said. "You've done what you said you'd do. We know it's there. Let's go back, now."

"I..." Remus stared over Sirius's shoulder, into the dark, wintry wilds beyond. He wanted this so badly. More than he'd ever wanted anything; except - maybe - the boy standing before him. "I have to." He finished. It was an insufficient explanation, but it was all he had.

"There you lot are! Where's Pete?"

Sirius and Remus's deadlock was interrupted by James's cheerful shout. They both turned to see him striding towards them from the village, Lily at his side. "What are you doing all the way out here? Thought you were supposed to be trailing your scent all over town or something."

"Yeah, we're just coming back now." Sirius said - which Remus thought was pretty cheeky, not to mention presumptuous.

"You lot can." Remus said. "I'm not."

"Not what?" Lily asked, confused. "Where *is* Peter?"

Remus could feel the warm weight of Wormtail's furry little body in his pocket, but said nothing. James had been agonising for months over when to break the animagus thing to his girlfriend, and now was definitely not the right time.

"I'm not coming back with you. I have to go in there." He pointed at the forest, aware of how mad he sounded.

"You what?!" James looked concerned. His eyes flicked to Sirius automatically, which only annoyed Remus even more. Sirius wasn't his keeper, for god's sake.

"The wolf's in there." Sirius explained, "And Moony's gone completely mental and decided he has to go in and face it right *now*."

Remus's head snapped back to Sirius, outraged and betrayed.

"I have *not* gone mental, you prick!" He said, fiercely. How could he explain that this was just what had to happen? That he *knew* it, deep in his marrow; at his very core. "You lot go back, or wait here. You won't understand."

"Help us understand, Remus," Lily came forward, gently, "This isn't like you, barrelling into a fight..."

Remus nearly laughed in her face. Did no one remember who he was? What he was?

"I'm not going to *fight* anyone." He said. "I just want to talk to them. That's what I'm supposed to do."

They were all staring at him, unconvinced. His anger flared again, and he had a very unpleasant thought - that he could very easily get past them, if he wanted to. The magic in the forest was more than enough; it made him feel strong. He could force his friends to stay in place, and it wouldn't even tire him out, he probably wouldn't even need his wand. This notion burned so brightly it frightened him.

He looked at Lily again, refusing to look at Sirius or James. "We were wrong - this isn't a battle. And *I'm* not a weapon against the werewolves," he tried to explain, "I'm a... I dunno, a way in. They need to know I don't mean any harm."

"But Remus, if they're on you-know-who's side..."

"They're not!" He snapped. "Not all of them."

Lily looked uncertain, and Sirius was practically burning a hole in the back of Remus's head with his indignance. Remus ran his hands through his hair. They weren't going to understand. How could they? He barely did. "Look." He said. "This is important, and I need you all to trust me."

It wasn't a request, and nor was it received as one. James and Lily looked at each other, then at Sirius. James nodded.

"Ok, Moony."

Sirius made a noise of protest, but Remus was too far gone now to care. He would make it up to him later, when he could think clearly; when every instinct in him wasn't telling him to run into the forest at full pelt.

"Ok." He nodded back. "Stay here." A tug in his midriff as the magic took over - he would never be sure whether or not he had done it on purpose, and at the time he simply did not care.

He turned and began to walk into the forest, quickly, his long legs making long strides, his friends behind him, unmoving, unable to follow.

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics midway through are from 'Achilles Last Stand' by Led Zeppelin.

Seventh Year: Castor

It was easiest not to think, for the next few minutes at least. Remus did not slow down, or tire as quickly as usual - even his hip had stopped hurting. Despite the wheedling guilt he had to keep at bay, he had not felt so good in months. The scent grew stronger as the woods grew thicker, and a shade of darkness fell, casting strange shadows which seemed to move in the corners of Remus's eyes.

He didn't think. It was too late to think; he was too far gone.

Bloody hell a voice in his head popped out of nowhere, when you go for it you really go for it, don't ya sweetheart?

Grant. Remus didn't want to do this, now. **Shut up**, he willed his brain.

Oh, charming! Grant's voice cackled, here I am, only tryna help. Don't I always try to help?

I don't need help.

If you didn't, I wouldn't be here. Grant's voice countered. I could be someone else, if you prefer? Lots of sensible people to choose from. I've got Ferox here, wanna chat wif him? Or Lily, though she's a bit whingy, if you ask me... Dumbledore? Nah, bit of a prick. Ooh, how about your poshboy? Eh, 'Moony'?

Shut up. Remus repeated, walking faster, breathing harder.

Yeah, Grant's voice agreed, slyly, I can see why you wouldn't wanna talk to 'im, after what you just done.

I had to. Remus insisted. **None of you would understand.**

Well they won't now, you lunatic.

Remus ignored the voice. There was no time for this; he would just have to deal with the consequences later. He knew there was no coming back from it now, not really.

Hope you like the woods, Remus, Grant was whispering, now, 'Cos no one's going to want you back in civilisation after that mess.

Shut up, shut up, shut UP. Remus raged inside his head, like a mad person; like someone deranged. Perhaps it had been a mistake, to go alone. Perhaps he really had lost it, and his friends were only trying to keep him safe...

No. He caught the scent again, and it stirred up his insides so much that he felt as though he was being propelled by it; dragged forward, unable to resist. It was a feeling he had only ever associated with transformation before, and he had no more control over it in his human form than the wolf did. It was him - the other wolf, somewhere out there. Remus had to find him, or else... well, he wasn't sure, but it wasn't even worth considering.

Something moved, just ahead, and Remus froze. The different scents of the forest began to pile up, he had to concentrate to identify and categorise each one. There was magic. And there was a different kind... it wasn't the wolf; it was female - or feminine, at least, and not lupine at all.

He walked towards it, confused. It was very close, but he couldn't see anything. He found himself in a grove of silver birches - spindly, ghostly white trees with papery bark that glowed in the darkness of the woods. The scent was strong, but still nothing - and he had lost the wolf's trail.

Impatient, Remus pulled out his wand, and cast a revealing spell.

"*Aparecium*." His wand seemed to jump in his hand, the force of the magic was so strong.

An anguished wail filled the air, and the tree closest to Remus was no longer a tree, but a young woman. A dryad. She was beautiful - in her own way. Slender and tall as the trees she guarded, her skin glowed as white as silver bark, and her hair rustled with brittle wintry leaves. She rounded on him, baring sharp, yellow teeth, and he staggered back, shocked and amazed.

"Go away, nasty thing." She hissed, eyes narrowing. They were the colour of new spring leaves, unnaturally bright and fierce. "I dealt with the other, I'll deal with you too."

"Which other?!"

"The other half-beast." She glowered. The dryad was at least a head taller than him, and advanced at a steady pace, roots unfurling from the soles of her feet and winding towards him. As dreadful and fearsome as she was, Remus had to stay focussed on his goal.

"I'm looking for him - the other. I mean *you* no harm, or your... er... trees."

"Wizards do not belong here." She continued to scowl, "Even half-beast wizards. Get out."

"I will, as soon as I've---"

"Nasty, cruel, wicked creatures, foul, unnatural, don't belong, too dangerous..."

"It's not a full moon," he insisted, "I'm not going to transform, I swear!"

"Not wolf." She rasped, very close to him now, ivy and nettles winding their way towards him, covering his shoes. "Wizard. Wolf is welcome. Wolf is natural."

"Oh..." Remus didn't have a response to that, and the vines were tickling his ankles now, stinging him as they tightened. He still had his wand. He still had every curse he'd spent the last two weeks practicing. But now that the time had come to use them, Remus's conscience pricked.

The dryad was only doing what she was *supposed* to do; guarding her trees.

"Please!" Remus said, holding his hands up, hoping he looked deferential, "I promise I won't hurt you, or anyone - I just need to find the other... the other wolf. Then I'll go, I really will!"

"Lying, false-tongued, dirty..."

"I swear!"

"And the little one?"

"What!? Who?!"

Close up, he could see that her face was not smooth, like human skin, but finely lined and cracking, like bark; coal black beneath the tissue thin outer layer. She gave another harsh wail, and raised her hand. Remus flinched, but she didn't touch him - instead, there was a violent shaking inside of his robe pocket, and Wormtail came flying out, falling to the mulchy ground below with a soft 'pat'.

Shit. Remus thought. *Bloody Peter!*

The dryad raised her arm again, and Peter transformed into his human shape, trembling and cowering on the ground.

“Please, please don’t hurt me!” He whimpered, covering his face. Remus stepped in front of him, quickly. Of all the people to have at your side in a situation like this.

“Liar!” The dryad hissed again triumphantly, leafy hair bristling, “Deceitful, filthy wizards...”

She was raising both arms now, and her eyes had darkened to the colour of pine needles. Remus was now completely sure that she meant them serious harm; every one of her pointed little teeth was showing. He couldn’t disarm her, she didn’t have a wand. He wasn’t even sure if the usual defensive spells would work on her. Remus had just decided to use a knockback jinx to buy himself some time, when --

“*C-c-confringo* !” Peter squeaked from behind him, pointing his stubby little wand over Remus’s shoulder.

Oh jesus christ... Remus thought, as he ducked, reflexively. Fortunately, Peter was either so frightened, or just inept, that the blasting curse didn’t have its usual devastating effect. Still, it was enough to cause some serious damage to the trees behind the dryad, setting a few leaves on fire. She screamed, a heart wrenching, painful screech, and turned immediately to tend to the smoking branches. Peter and Remus took their chance and ran, vines snapping as they tore their feet from the ground.

Peter followed Remus, but neither of them were especially fast runners, and by the time they judged it safe to stop, they were both wheezing heavily.

“Bloody... hell... Pete...” Remus panted bending forward, one arm against an oak for support.

“I didn’t know what to do!” Peter replied, red faced, pale hair plastered to his forehead. “Let’s go back, Remus, please...” He looked around, anxiously. They were even deeper in the woods now, and other than their own labored breathing it was deathly quiet.

Still, Remus shook his head, straightening up.

“No.” He said, “I have to find them. She hurt him.”

“So *what* ?!” Peter replied, indignant, “We’re not supposed to be here!”

“Look, I’m sorry you got caught up in this,” Remus frowned, impatiently. Now that they weren’t in immediate danger, his desire to hunt the other wolf down had returned. He could smell blood; he was sure of it. “But I have to. You can go back, if you want - go and find the others.”

Peter looked behind him, then back at Remus, his eyes big and shimmering,

“On my own?” The tremor in his voice was palpable, and Remus suddenly wanted him gone more than anything in the world, in case the terror was catching.

“I’ll give you my watch, so you don’t get lost.” Remus offered.

“No.” Peter stiffened his lips, “I’ll come with you.”

Pete’s heartbeat was almost deafening, and Remus was starting to feel sorry for him.

"It's ok," he whispered. "If something happens, you can just transform back, and go and tell the others, can't you? You'll know the way better, as a rat."

"I won't leave you, Remus," Peter whispered, shakily, "I can be brave, I know I can."

Remus squeezed his shoulder.

"Fine. This way. Keep as quiet as you can."

The dryad had not come after them, thank goodness. Remus couldn't remember everything about tree guardians, but he was fairly sure they couldn't leave their groves. Or maybe that was naiads? He couldn't remember the difference.

But it didn't matter now, he'd picked up the scent properly. A mouth watering, rich, iron tang that made his stomach growl shamefully. They were still days out from the full moon, but that didn't seem to matter to the wolf inside Remus, who was scaling the walls of its prison, howling for freedom.

"It's close." Remus whispered to Peter, as they pressed through a heavy thicket, probably announcing their arrival to every creature nearby.

There was another heartbeat, not very far away, and that sounded frightened, too. A few steps more and Remus could hear laboured breathing; like someone who had been struggling for a while now, and was beginning to tire. Closer still and he could smell the sweat - and the rage - from this struggle. It was such a strong mix of emotions and energy, that Remus was momentarily lost in the fog of it, too overwhelmed to see a clear direction. Then it changed - stilled, suddenly. A harsh voice rang out, shattering the quiet of the woods, shaking birds from their nests;

"Remus Lupin !"

Peter gave out a sharp squeak of terror, before leaping a foot in the air, transforming, and turning tail, scampering away from Remus. No matter. Remus stood taller.

"I'm here." He whispered, back.

"Come to me."

That tugging sensation returned to Remus's chest, and he followed it, letting himself be drawn forward, through to a small clearing of trees. At its centre was an ancient yew, gnarled and creaking, and bound to the trunk was a young man. The dryad had him tied in place with miles of cruel, twisted bramble. The thorns were cutting into his worn leather cloak, and puncturing the skin of his neck. His arms were at his sides, and despite obvious attempts to free himself, the brown, sinewy stems held firm.

He wasn't struggling now, though. He was just staring at Remus, head bent forward, eyes dark and inscrutable. His head was shaved, as Livia's had been, and his clothes were weather worn and threadbare, but there the resemblance ended. He was tall; as tall as Remus, and perhaps only a few years older. His skin was as dark as tanned leather, his features handsome and striking. He smiled, slowly, showing rows of straight white teeth.

"Remus Lupin. Set me free."

"Who are you?" Remus held back, gripping his wand inside his pocket.

"I am Castor. Set me free. I am your brother."

Remus cocked his head. This man was trapped. Utterly at Remus's mercy. He felt his courage returning.

"My brother, are you? Greyback send you?"

"Yes."

"Well." Remus leaned against the nearest tree and folded his arms, "You're going to have to give me a decent reason to set you free then, aren't you?"

Castor roared, furiously, fighting against his bonds once more, tearing his clothes and driving the thorns deeper into his neck. He was clearly very strong, with a broad build, thick biceps flexing against the vines.

"Oh dear," Remus tutted, conversationally, "Looks like you're not going anywhere without me."

He would later wonder where this ridiculous sense of cockiness had come from. After all, the situation Remus now found himself in was every bit as dangerous as the attack on Diagon Alley, which had turned his mind inside out. Perhaps it was the woods, and the power he could feel coursing through him. Perhaps it was Grant's voice, still ringing in his ears. Perhaps it was simply the familiarity of the situation. Remus had been facing off against bullies who thought they had him figured out since he was six years old. "So?" He said, smiling, "Wanna talk?"

"I was sent to talk."

"Really? Just talk?"

"Just talk. Set me free."

"Mm." Remus played with the tip of his wand, thoughtfully, as if he hadn't a care in the world.

"See, I've got a bit of a problem believing you, Castor, mate. Seeing as the last time Greyback sent someone to 'just talk' to me, an innocent woman ended up dead."

"My father recognises his mistake in sending Livia." The werewolf said, earnestly. He had calmed down a bit, now, and was clearly watching Remus to see where this was going. "So this time he has sent me."

"I can see right through that, too, you know," Remus mused, "Thought a good looking bloke might... er... peak my interest, did he?"

Castor kept staring at him, eyes narrowing. Remus shrugged and continued, "I mean, I'm flattered, Castor, don't get me wrong, I'm sure you're lovely, but I'm still not interested. And I have to say, so far I'm not very impressed. Not as good at magic as your pal Livia, then? She'd have apparated right out of that, no trouble."

"That tree-bitch!" Castor snarled, struggling again, "Whatever she's done, these vines... I can't use magic..."

"Oh I *see* !" Remus nodded, "Well, must remember to thank her, next time I see her."

"Livia told me about you," Castor said, "She said you're Dumbledore's pet hound, toothless. Wouldn't hurt a fly, wouldn't chase a rabbit on a full moon."

"I'm nobody's pet." Remus replied, his jaw clenching. "And nor should you be. What's so great about Greyback, eh? What do you lot think's going to happen to you when we defeat Voldemort?"

“The same thing that always happens to our kind.” Castor replied, giving Remus a pitying look, “We will be hunted and oppressed.”

“Don’t you want to change that?” Remus implored, taking a step forward. “Don’t you have a family, in the real world? Don’t you want a family, one day?”

“We are a pack. We are everything.”

Remus sighed.

“You don’t understand. He’s lying to you. I know there’s a way to make things better, to really change the way we’re treated, but it can’t be like this, don’t you see?”

Castor sneered at him disdainfully.

“Just as Livia said. Toothless. Told father you weren’t ready. Told him it was too soon.”

“Too soon for what?”

“For the big night, of course,” Castor was smiling again, a sinister grin which made Remus feel queasy. The werewolf continued, recognising Remus’s uncertainty, “On the night of the next moon, the pack will be on the hunt. It will be a hunt such as the world has not seen since the dark ages.”

“Why are you telling me this?” There was a quaver on Remus’s voice now, as much as he tried to disguise it, “You know I’m going straight to Dumbledore.”

Castor laughed, a breathless, hollow sound coming from deep in his chest.

“Perfect.”

CRACK

Remus winced as the air around them shimmered slightly, and he staggered back from the figure who had appeared between them in the clearing. She hissed, low under her breath, steely eyes flicking from Remus to Castor. Livia.

“Sister!” Castor rasped, straining for freedom once more, “Release me!”

“You have failed our father.” She replied. “Punishment awaits.”

“No!” Castor protested, “It was the dryad, I could not--”

Livia raised a hand, and Castor was silenced, unable to move or make a sound. Remus’s insides froze as she turned on him.

“Hello, my love. Are you ready?”

Remus pulled his wand out and pointed it at her, assuming a duelling stance and rooting himself to the ground. She would not hold him, this time. This time he knew what to expect.

“I’m not going anywhere, Livia.”

“There isn’t time for this, the moon approaches.” She tutted, walking towards him, as ragged and filthy and wild as he remembered her. “Drop that silly stick.” She raised a hand and twisted it mid air, as if she was turning a door knob. Remus felt the strength of it, prying his fingers apart, his

wand burning in his hand, but this time, he did not drop it. He clenched his teeth and gathered every ounce of magic from the woods around him.

“No.”

“Remus Lupin.” She growled, “You will come with us.”

She raised both arms now, and flicked her fingers, so that they fanned out from her palms. The trees surrounding Remus caught light in an instant, from trunk to branches, blazing columns of fire roaring around him. He was terrified, but he was not letting go.

“No.” He repeated, stepping backwards, slowly. He would run, if he had to, let the dryads deal with them - let the centaurs do it, come to that. You didn’t just show up in a forest like this and start burning it down.

Livia snapped her fingers then, and at once Castor was freed from his bondage, gasping and snarling. He joined his pack mate, and now there were two of them, their eyes glowing like hot coals, reflecting back the flames surrounding them.

“The time has come, Remus Lupin,” they said, in unison, as black smoke began to fill the air, the scent of sap and pine fizzling around them.

“No.” He said again, though he could see no way out, now. “*Mordeo !*” He shouted, aiming his wand at them, as he backed away. Castor recoiled, growling, but Livia laughed throatily, and waved her hand again, dismissing the curse as if it was no more than a cobweb.

This was it. They were going to take him - god knows where - and make him one of them. He would never see his friends again, never see Sirius again. He had been such an idiot, forcing them to stay behind. Now there was nobody left to protect him.

There’s you. Remus didn’t recognise this voice. It wasn’t Grant’s, or anyone he’d ‘spoken to’ before. But maybe it was right. There was a spell he hadn’t considered, simply because he had never mastered it properly. But he was in dire straits now, and he had more power than ever before at his disposal.

As bright embers and burning leaves rained down on the three of them, Remus gathered all of his resources; his strength, and his rage, and every joy in his heart. He would have to be ready to run, as soon as the incantation was spoken. If it failed, he would have no time at all to make his escape.

He breathed in, carefully, and - just before he cast the spell - recalled Sirius’s eyes, and Sirius’s mouth, and Sirius grinning. “*I’m mental about you.*”

“*Expecto Patronum!*” He practically screamed it, extending his arm, directing his wand as an enormous silver animal burst forth, leaping towards Livia and Castor, huge jaws wide, claws bared. In the split second before he began to run, Remus saw them both cover their eyes, and turn to run in the opposite direction as the great beast lunged at them.

But there wasn’t time to stay and enjoy his success, so he didn’t. He ran again, for the edge of the woods; back to Hogsmeade, and the wizarding world, and his friends. Remus ran so hard that his legs were burning, and the pain in his hip was like a spear in his side, but he did not stop, lungs full of woodsmoke and eyes watering, he just kept going until the trees began to thin, and the light grew stronger.

* * *

Peter and Sirius were still there. Sirius was pacing erratically back and forth on the footpath. Peter was sitting on the ground with his knees drawn up, staring at the woods. He looked as though he had been crying.

Remus staggered out into the daylight, and felt ready to collapse right there. Peter stood up, wiping his eyes in disbelief, and Sirius ran towards him, and then stopped, suddenly, and was knocked back, as though he'd hit a wall. Furious, he gave out an angry grunt. Remus allowed one of the knots inside him to unravel, and the barrier was lifted. He limped towards his two friends, wheezing.

"Sorry." He murmured.

Much to his surprise, Sirius threw his arms around his neck, and held him tightly. His heartbeat thrummed against Remus's, and he hugged him back, exhausted and grateful.

"We couldn't come and help." Sirius said, his voice hoarse and hollow, "Whatever you did... we couldn't follow you."

"I'm sorry." Remus said, again.

"I'm so sorry, Remus!" Peter suddenly burst out, his eyes filling with tears again, "I'm so sorry!"

"It's ok." Remus reached out an arm to pat his shoulder, but Sirius wouldn't let him go yet. Finally, Remus came back to his senses, and gently untangled himself, "I have to see Dumbledore, right now. Where are the others?"

"They had to go back," Sirius explained, "Curfew. They said they'd tell McGonagall."

"Good." Remus nodded. "Come on, we have to go, now." He began to hobble towards the village.

"Moony, are you ok?" Sirius hurried alongside him, an arm under his shoulder for support.

"Just tired," Remus said.

"You're covered in... is that soot?"

"There was a fire..."

"Wormtail said something was summoning you."

"I can't... I can't explain it, yet, please don't ask me."

"Fine." There was a cold edge to Sirius's voice which Remus didn't like, but he kept supporting him, and he kept going, so it would have to be ignored for now. One thing at a time.

McGonagall was waiting for them at the school gates, her arms folded, deep lines creasing her forehead.

"Professor!" Remus spluttered, still coughing up smoke, "I'm sorry we missed the curfew, but I need to see the headmaster right--"

"Yes of course, Lupin, come with me." McGonagall nodded, quickly, and took his arm from Sirius. She peered down at Sirius and Peter. "You two go to the tower and say nothing. I don't want any arguments, do you hear me?"

The two young men were so surprised by these sharp instructions that they both nodded and left,

immediately, Sirius throwing one glance back at Remus.

He told Dumbledore almost everything. He told him about the scent, and the dryad, and Castor. About the fire, and the plans Greyback had for his pack, and Livia. He did not mention the barrier he had somehow conjured, to keep his friends back. Nor did he explain that he had known how dangerous it would be, or that he had ignored every ounce of good sense he had in order to pursue Castor.

Dumbledore seemed very pleased, nonetheless.

“Everything you have told me is immensely useful, Remus.” The old man said, smiling across his desk at Remus with eyes twinkling with pride, for the first time Remus could remember. “You were very brave, and fulfilled your task admirably.”

“I... I did? Even though I went in the forbidden forest?”

“You followed your quarry. And I don’t see that any harm has come to you? You are clearly a formidable wizard, like your father.”

Remus felt a very small twinge of pleasure at that, which put him more at ease.

“This attack, though... the hunt they’re planning--”

“Let the Order deal with that.” Dumbledore shook his head, placing his hands on his desk and rising to his feet. “You have done quite enough - more than anyone could expect of a seventeen year old wizard.”

“Yes, but if I can--”

“I am sorry I asked this of you, Remus.” Dumbledore came around his desk and placed a friendly hand on his shoulder. “I hope I will not have to ask again.”

“I’m on your side.” Remus replied, feeling he ought to reiterate this. “I’ll do what has to be done.”

Dumbledore’s eyes glittered with triumph, and his grip tightened on Remus’s shoulder.

* * *

The fire had been put out by the naiads, according to McGonagall, who walked him from Dumbledore’s office to the infirmary. There had been no trace of Livia or Castor, and it was assumed they had apparated.

Madam Pomfrey tutted over him, cleaned off the soot and administered a pain killing draught. By then he was breathing normally again, and perversely quite fancied a cigarette, though he didn’t tell her that. Food was brought to him there, because by this time he had missed dinner, and he ate a pleasant, quiet supper in Madam Pomfrey’s homely little office.

Thankfully, he was permitted to walk back to Gryffindor tower alone. His friends were all waiting - not in their usual place by the fire, but in a quieter corner, near one of the far windows. They were all speaking in serious, hushed tones, and their heads turned at once to face him as he appeared through the portrait hole.

He walked over, a bit woozy from the draught he’d taken, and they made room for him to sit in the window seat, squashed between Lily and Sirius, who quickly squeezed his hand, before letting go. They all stared at him, and waited for him to speak, so he did.

He told them as much as he could - and a few things he hadn't said to Dumbledore. Peter had luckily already covered the dryad, and apparently the marauders had spent much of their evening explaining the animagus secret to Lily. Still, she covered her mouth in horror when Remus talked about encountering Castor, and Livia's incredible powers, and the fire... Sirius was practically quaking with rage beside him, but held his tongue the whole time, and let Remus finish.

"Bloody hell." James said, once the story was told. "Well done on the patronus, though, mate."

"Thanks," Remus blushed, slightly. Trust James to find something praiseworthy, in all of that.

"Did you see what it was?"

"No." he said, quickly, "It happened too fast."

Not long afterwards, they all trailed up to bed, one at a time, each of them with their faces set in a determined mask. Remus realised that he was not the only one who had had a very trying day. He took a quick shower, to get the last of the forest off him, and brushed his teeth without looking in the mirror, too afraid of what he might see there. Sirius still hadn't tried to talk to him, or confront him about the terrible betrayal back at the forest edge, but Remus was certain this was yet to come, and though he knew it would be hard, he looked forward to clearing the air.

For hours, he lay in bed, waiting and hoping. Sirius always came to him, on a night like this; if something had happened. Sirius always knew when Remus needed to talk; even when Remus didn't want to, Sirius could get it out of him, and make everything right again. Remus waited for a long time. **Come on**, he thought to himself, **I need you, where are you?**

He ain't a mind reader, sweetheart. Grant's chirpy voice broke through once more.

He knows me, though.

Oh yeah? You ever told him?

Remus declined to answer, because it was no longer necessary. Working through problems in your head using imaginary roleplay was all well and good. But that's what he'd done when he'd felt most alone. When he thought he'd had no one else to turn to. He realised with a sickening sense of shame just how stupid he'd been. Without wasting another moment, he slid out of bed and crossed the floor. He parted Sirius's bed curtains, and whispered into the darkness,

"Sirius?"

"What?" Sirius was lying on his back, too, hands folded over his middle like a tombstone effigy. His coldness made Remus flinch, but he swallowed his pride.

"I need you."

Sirius turned his head at once. He sighed and pulled back the covers.

"Get in."

Remus scrambled inside, eagerly. They lay next to each other, on their sides, staring at each other.

"Do you hate me?" Remus asked.

"No." Sirius replied, voice still empty.

"I'm really sorry. I wanted to protect you all."

"I know. That's what James said." Sirius's voice had melted slightly, and was now more petulant than angry.

"But it's no excuse," Remus continued. "I just... I wasn't myself. Do you understand?"

Sirius shrugged, moving the bed sheets so that they slid off his shoulder, exposing his collar bone. Remus tried not to get too distracted by that, and licked his lips, meeting Sirius's eye again.

"I'll tell you everything." He said.

"You told us." Sirius replied, tetchily.

"Not everything." Remus replied, "There are things I don't want everyone to know about. But. I want *you* to know. If that's ok?"

Sirius stared at him as if he couldn't believe his ears. A small smile was creeping onto his face, and he was obviously trying to suppress it.

"Go on, then."

So he did. He told him every feeling he had had - the irresistible pull into the forest, the rugged power of natural magic, the terrible guilt. By the time he had stopped speaking, he realised that Sirius had reached out to him, and was stroking his arm, gently, back and forth to comfort him.

"What made you think of casting a patronus?"

Remus snorted, lightly,

"It's stupid. Voice in my head."

"Ah."

"Not like the normal voices, though. Usually it's someone I know."

"Maybe this time it was just *you*."

Remus thought about this. It made him feel funny. Sirius was still watching him, still stroking his arm. Remus remembered something else.

"It's a wolf. My patronus. I didn't want the others to know, I don't want them to think..."

"They'd never think badly of you, Moony, they know you too well."

"Do they, though? After today... I just feel so stupid. I got so caught up, I didn't know what to do. I just kept getting in deeper and deeper."

"But you did the right thing, in the end." Sirius said, firmly, gripping him now, "That's all that matters." He leaned forward and kissed Remus gently on the lips, a calming gesture. "You came back to us."

"I..." Remus looked down, lowering his voice to barely a whisper. He looked up at Sirius again, meeting those perfect blue eyes. "I came back to *you*."

Sirius kissed him again, harder, and did not stop for a long time.

Seventh Year: Interlude

Chapter Summary

Interlude: /'ɪntəl(j)uːd/

Noun

1. An intervening period of time; an interval.
2. A temporary amusement or diversion that contrasts with what goes before or after.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

You look so self-possessed

I won't disturb your rest

It's lovely when you're sleeping

But wide awake is best.

Wake up and make love with me

Wake up and make love

Wake up and make love with me

I don't want to make you

I'll let the fancy take you

And you'll wake up and make love

Tuesday 24th January 1978

7:50 AM

James woke them on Tuesday morning, calling through the curtains,

“Oi, Padfoot, get up! Nearly eight, you lazy sod.”

“I’ve got a free study day, arsehole, piss off.” Sirius groaned in reply, burying his head under his pillow.

“You’ll miss breakfast!”

“Urrgh.”

“Fine, starve then.” James replied. Then, “Seen Moony? His bed’s empty - don’t think he should be off on his own, do you?”

“Err...” Sirius lifted the pillow from his face, and looked at Remus, raising an eyebrow in question.

Remus stared back in panic. Ok, James *knew* but so far they’d managed to avoid his having any actual encounters with their relationship. Remus was very particular about it; he didn’t want to be gawked at. He wanted to prove that everything was just the same as before, and that meant that what happened between him and Sirius in private ought to be kept... well, private. He’d been fastidious about bed sharing, making sure to get up early and creep back to his own bed, or else rumple his bedsheets and head straight for the shower. But it was the full moon, and he was slower than usual.

“Probably gone for breakfast, mate.” Sirius called back. He shrugged at Remus.

“Yeah maybe...” James agreed, “...Oh, hang on, I’ll check the map, he’s left it on his bedside table!”

Remus slapped his head, astounded by his own stupidity.

“I’m in here, James!” He shouted, quickly, feeling himself turn red with embarrassment.

“Oh!” They heard James stop still, just outside the bed curtains, “Oh... er, right, of course! Sorry, I... er... didn’t think...” His steps receded quickly, towards the door, “Sorry lads... er... see you later, eh?” The door slammed shut.

Sirius snorted with laughter as Remus crawled under the sheets as if he could escape the embarrassment there.

“Oh, come on,” Sirius laughed, trying to pull the sheets back, “It wasn’t that bad...”

“It’s horrible.” Remus replied, burying himself further, “I’ll never be able to look him in the eye again!”

Sirius crawled under the sheets too, chasing him.

“It’s not like we were *doing* anything - you’ve still got your pyjamas on!”

“*Prongs* doesn’t know that!” Remus retorted, sitting cross legged, facing Sirius. It was like they were under their own little tent now, and reminded Remus of camping. That was such a nice memory that he felt a bit calmer. Even better; Sirius always held his hand when they were hidden away like this, and he reached out now, playing with Remus’s long, scarred fingers as though they were precious treasure.

“I don’t see what the fuss is about,” Sirius mused, lacing his soft white fingers between Remus’s, then splaying them out, then wiggling them, like a children’s game. “I’m sure he already assumes... some things.”

“See! You can’t say it either!”

“Well. I’m a gentleman.” Sirius smirked, looking up at him now. Even in the dark, Remus could feel Sirius’s eyes burning. He was biting his lip, too. Remus gave a little sigh, and Sirius quirked an eyebrow. “At least we know we’ve got the room to ourselves...” he placed a hand on each of Remus’s knees and leaned in.

Remus kissed him, but pushed him away,

“No way, if we don’t go down there *right now*, James is definitely going to think we’re...”

“Shagging?”

“...being *physically intimate*.” Remus said, piously.

Sirius burst out laughing again, and rolled back on the bed.

“Oh Moony! You kill me. What happened to that rough little yob I used to know?”

“Some posh boy taught him to read.” Remus replied, dryly, flinging back the covers and rubbing the static out of his curls. “Right. Quick shower, then we’ll go down.” He jumped out of bed, wincing a bit at the bright sunlight filling the dorm room.

“I like the sound of that!” Sirius called from the bed as Remus crossed the floor. In the bathroom doorway he turned and gave Sirius his most withering look.

“Down *stairs*. Pervert.”

* * *

8:30 AM

James couldn’t quite look at either of them in the eye, as it happened - much to Sirius’s amusement. Peter had his head down too, quietly shovelling porridge into his mouth, and for a horrifying moment Remus wondered whether he had told James exactly what *he* had seen in their bedroom, only a few short days ago. That would be too much to come back from, Remus was sure.

He distracted himself by listening to Mary talk, which was always easy to do. She was going out with a boy on the Hufflepuff quidditch team these days, and was simultaneously extolling his virtues and bemoaning the pitfalls of seeing an athlete. Remus couldn’t help but think that Mary was preaching to the choir a bit, as of course Lily (and, if Sirius was to be believed) Marlene were both going out with quidditch players too.

“I mean, obviously he’s fit. Like... Adonis level.” She gushed, dreamily, “And talk about *stamina* ...”

Marlene was rolling her eyes, and James was staring fixedly at his cup of tea while Lily giggled behind her hands. Mary was gloriously oblivious, in her element. “But then he has the gall to whine about thigh chafing from his bloody broom!” She cackled.

James’s ears had turned bright red, and Sirius was trying to catch his eye, a manic grin on his face.

Mary carried on; “I told him if he thinks *that’s* uncomfortable, he should try bleeding from his snatch five days a month.”

Peter practically choked on his porridge, Lily covered her face, and Marlene slammed her hand on the table,

“Fucking *hell*, Mary! Do you have to?!”

“What?” Mary sat up, blinking, looking as though butter wouldn’t melt on her wicked tongue.

“Well. You’re being a *bit* graphic, for the breakfast table...” Lily said, diplomatically.

“We’re all adults, aren’t we?” Mary arched an eyebrow, “We’re mature enough to talk about *sex* .”

“Right, I’d better be off!” James leapt to his feet, uncharacteristically clumsy, rattling the table as he did so. Lily looked up at him, surprised,

“Where are you going?”

“Potions!”

“It’s not for another fifteen... Ok, wait, I’ll come with you.” She got up, still giving her boyfriend a strange look, and they left together.

“Didn’t know James was such a prude.” Mary commented.

“Oh, it wasn’t you, MacDonald.” Sirius explained, stretching his arms over his head and touseling his long hair, “Prongsie-boy just had a bit of a surprise this morning -- ow!”

Remus had kicked him sharply under the table. Marlene watched them both, sipping her tea with a knowing look. Fortunately, at that moment, the post owls swooped into the Great Hall, and a large barn owl dropped two letters in front of Remus’s plate. He snatched them both up, eagerly.

One was a postcard from Grant - forwarded on via the Potters’ - with a lewd cartoon on the front, depicting a man on the seashore holding an enormous red stick of Brighton rock against his crotch. The back just read ‘*Saw this and thought of you. Looking at flats next week! Love.*’

Remus grinned at this, and handed it to Sirius, who scowled comically. The second letter was from Professor Ferox, with a list of book recommendations Remus had requested on the history of the magical creatures classification system. They’d been writing back and forth since Christmas; it seemed Ferox was bored with his recuperation, finding himself at a loose end.

Sirius watched Remus finish reading the letter.

“Anything from...?” He asked, giving a significant look. Remus shook his head. Nothing from his mother. Sirius tried to flash him a cheering smile, “Still time, eh?”

Remus just shrugged.

“Going to the library, see if I can find any of these before History of Magic.” He held up Ferox’s list. “See you later, girls.” He nodded at Mary and Marlene.

“See you in the hospital wing, this evening?” Marlene asked, hopefully.

Ah, Remus remembered, it was Tuesday. He hadn’t been attending the healing lessons Madam Pomfrey had kindly included him in for some weeks now - too busy memorising curses. He didn’t *really* want to go this evening, it being a full moon, but he looked at Marlene and felt guilty.

“Of course!” He nodded. “See you then!”

Sirius bounded happily alongside Remus as he made his way to the library, mentally working through his timetable for the day. He only had three classes, luckily, but he’d promised to catch up with Christopher at some point, and he wanted to write back to both Grant and Ferox, and he had an Arithmancy essay due...

“Moowooooony? Earth calling planet Moony...!” Sirius interrupted his thoughts.

“Hm?”

“We just walked past the library, if that’s where you were heading...”

“Oh! Bollocks.” Remus turned 180 degrees and started back, Sirius still in tow.

“Care to share?”

“Oh, nothing. just thinking.”

“Not worrying, I hope? About tonight?”

“Mm a bit.” They entered the library and had to be quiet as they passed Madam Pince’s desk.

He’d actually been trying not to think about the coming moon - after all, Dumbledore had said not to. He’d said the Order were dealing with it, and Remus could only hope that that meant Alastor Moody was on the case, which made him feel slightly better. Still, Castor’s warning had been ringing in his ears since Saturday, and it was impossible to forget.

“I don’t think we ought to leave the shack, tonight.” Remus whispered. “If anything happens...”

“It won’t, Dumbledore’s dealing with it.” Sirius replied, leaning against the nearest bookcase casually, while Remus looked for the texts he wanted. Remus had to stop himself from tutting. James and Sirius put so much faith in Dumbledore, he often wondered whether he was missing something. But then, Remus trusted very few people over the age of eighteen; with good reason.

“I know.” He said, calmly, “But I’d like you to respect my wishes, if it’s all the same to you.”

“Hey, don’t be like that,” Sirius chided, gently, “Of course we will. Anything for our Moony.”

Remus found three of the books on Ferox’s list, which cheered him up a bit. He took them to Madam Pince, then began to tuck them into his bag.

“I’ll take them,” Sirius offered, holding out his hands, “You don’t want to be lugging them around all day, I’m going back to the dorm anyway.”

“Oh, cheers.” Remus handed them over. “Are you going to start on that Arithmancy essay?”

“Not if I can possibly avoid it.” Sirius pulled a face. “See you at lunch? You’re free this afternoon, aren’t you?”

“Er... yeah, but I’m supposed to be seeing Christopher... then there’s that essay you’re not doing, and healing class. And I really want to write back to Ferox *today*, if I can, I think he likes getting the post, since he’s not allowed out much.”

“Merlin, Remus,” Sirius was shaking his head, “You’ve got to be at the Shack by six!”

“I’m aware,” Remus replied, offhandedly, adjusting his book bag. It could really do with another mending spell; unless you held it just right the seams started splitting.

“And are you planning to eat?!” Sirius continued.

“When have I ever forgotten a meal?” Remus poked his tongue out. “Anyway, I have to run - History. See you at lunch!”

* * *

1:50 PM

In spite of his promises, Remus was extremely late for lunch, and had missed everyone except Sirius, who had waited back.

“Sorry!” Remus gasped as he reached the table, a little breathless from running. He sat down, “Stayed back to talk to Kettleburn, then remembered I’d forgotten my notes in Professor Binns’ room. History was a bloody waste, too, all stuff I’ve covered in the reading--oh, thank you!”

Sirius had pushed a plate of sausage and mash across the table to him. Remus dug in, eating and talking as quickly as he could - they only had ten minutes before lunch was over and the school choir would want the Hall for their weekly practice sessions. “Anyway, it worked out nicely in the end, I used the time to write my letter to Ferox *and* a note for Grant, so at least that’s done -- what’s that?”

Sirius had slid a stack of parchment across the table now. Remus drained his glass of pumpkin juice and looked down at it. “Arithmancy?”

“Your essay,” Sirius said, casually, “Finished mine, like a good boy, so I thought I’d do yours too.”

“You what?” Remus did a double take. Sirius was ridiculously good with a quill, and had mimicked his own spidery handwriting perfectly. “I don’t believe you!”

“How many times have you done it for Wormy? Or James, for that matter - he’s still got a stick up his arse about this morning, by the way, won’t talk to me about it - anyway, now that’s done, and the letters, you’re free for the afternoon!”

“Thanks so much, Padfoot, honestly, this is brilliant... but I did promise to see Christopher, and--”

“Nope.” Sirius was grinning like the cat who’d got the cream. “Just saw him. Told him you weren’t well, so you couldn’t see him.”

“Sirius!”

“Well you’re *not* well.” Sirius responded, innocently. “What with tonight, you ought to be resting.”

“I’ll be fine once I’ve eaten.” Remus replied shortly, eyes on his food, mopping up the last of the gravy with his mashed potato. He’d lick the plate if he was shameless enough; full moons made him ravenous. When he’d finished, he looked up and found Sirius staring at him, big eyes full of puppy-ish remorse.

“Angry with me?”

“No.” Remus wiped his mouth with his sleeve and pushed his plate away in time for it to vanish back down to the kitchens. “But you can’t re-organise my life like that just to get your own way...”

“I didn’t mean it like that!” Sirius sat up, looking shocked, “I just... you always have so much on, and it’s insane. I mean, it’s amazing, because you’re amazing, and you can handle it, but you don’t *have* to.”

“Ok...” Remus frowned, getting up. He wasn’t sure exactly what Sirius was saying. He had always tried to keep busy. He *liked* being busy, and useful to people.

“And you’d written so many notes for that essay it practically wrote itself.” Sirius continued, as they left the Great Hall and began to head for Gryffindor tower. “And we can go and find Christopher if you want, he’s probably in the library...”

“Sirius...” Remus sighed, fondly.

“Go on, I’ll post the letters for you, and I’ll see you for early dinner -”

“Sirius...” He checked the coast was clear - everyone was in lessons, and Peeves wasn’t about. An empty corridor was a rare thing at Hogwarts.

“Oh bugger!” Sirius slapped his forehead, “I *can’t* do early dinner, I’ve got that detention with Filch. Only for an hour though, I’ll be out in time for--”

“Sirius!”

“What?!” He finally stopped talking in time for Remus to catch him unawares with a quick kiss on the lips.

“Shut up, you idiot.” He smiled, “I’d *much* rather spend the afternoon with you than studying with Christopher.”

“Oh.” Sirius blushed, looking very pleased.

* * *

2:15 PM

Less than twenty minutes later, and Remus was completely blissed out, lying on his back with the record player at his feet and Sirius’s head resting against his good hip. Bowie was singing and strumming his eight string, and the two boys listening were sharing a spliff Sirius had charmed off a Ravenclaw earlier that week.

“Does the wolf get stoned too?” Sirius asked, reaching up for his turn. Remus shook his head, inhaling deeply and passing the joint.

“Hungrier, probably.” He replied, voice high.

“Hmm.” Sirius murmured.

Remus exhaled and closed his eyes, settling back on the pile of cushions. It was like sinking into warm treacle. He let his thoughts drift.

“Can I ask you something?” He mumbled,

“Fire away, Moony.”

“What was Mary on about, this morning?”

“About the Hufflepuff keeper’s stamina? I think she was blagging, to be honest with you.”

“Not that,” Remus chuckled, “The bleeding thing... bleeding from her... um... What did she mean?”

Sirius swivelled his head in Remus’s lap to look up at him, wearing a bemused frown.

“She was talking about... you know, her ‘time of the month’...” He raised his eyebrows, as if Remus was supposed to catch on somehow.

“What’s that?” Remus frowned back, none the wiser.

“*Re mus*... seriously?!”

“What??”

“You know! Girls are different from boys...”

“Well I know *that* .” Remus bristled, feeling defensive now.

“Ok, so girls get this thing every month...” Sirius began to explain. Remus was utterly horrified, by the time he’d finished.

“That’s the most disgusting thing I’ve ever heard.” He said, flatly.

“It’s natural.” Sirius shrugged, “I’ll get Lily to explain it to you, I probably told it wrong. Bloody hell, you’re nearly eighteen, how did you not *know* ?!”

“Oh yeah, make fun of the Care Home kid.” Remus tutted, “I grew up in a boys’ reformatory! How am I supposed to know anything about girls?!”

“Explains a lot.” Sirius said, dryly. Remus flicked his ear, sharply. “Ow!”

“What’s your detention for, anyway?” Remus asked, settling back again.

“Hexed Crouch.”

“Oh right.”

“Him and *my darling brother* were tormenting some second years - but obviously *he* got out of it because *he’s* a prefect.” Sirius muttered, darkly.

He never said Regulus’s name any more, just ‘ *my darling brother* ’, in that cruel, overly plummy accent, which Remus thought was probably to make fun of Regulus’s posh-ness. Except (and Remus would never say this out loud) for the first few years Remus had known Sirius, he’d had exactly the same clipped received enunciation.

“Ought to try and ignore them, if you can.” Remus advised. “I know he bothers you, but it’s better to just stay out of his way. School’s over, soon.”

“I know.” Sirius said, hogging the spliff.

Remus reached for it, snatching his wrist. God, he loved Sirius’s wrists. The bones were so fine, the veins like blue ribbon under translucent skin. His own fingers wrapped all the way around easily. He held it now, and pulled Sirius’s hand to his mouth, sucking the end of the joint, then letting him go.

Sirius just smirked up at him. The record stopped, and he had to get up to flip it to the b-side.

“I s’pose I just don’t want him to hurt anyone.” He sighed, settling back down.

“That’s not your job.” Remus frowned.

“Feels like it.” Sirius muttered, stretching. “You don’t know what he was like when we were kids. He wasn’t... he’s not... I dunno. I just don’t want him to do something he’ll regret, later on.”

Remus thought very hard - which was no mean feat, after a few lung fulls of Ravenclaw-grown hash.

“Tell you something?” He asked.

“A secret?” Sirius replied, eagerly, getting up to sit beside him.

“Er... sort of? But it’s about Regulus. You might not want to hear it.”

Sirius went a bit quiet; a bit more rigid, but he nodded,

“Go on.”

“Remember the boggart that got me and Chris, before Christmas?”

“How could I forget?” Sirius replied, a note of jealousy in his voice, “Wish I’d been there, never seen a boggart.”

“Werewolves not exciting enough for you now?” Remus raised his eyebrows. “Anyway, er... I checked the map, right after Chris went to get someone, and... well I’m pretty sure it was Regulus who put the boggart there. He and Barty were nearby.”

Remus craned his neck slightly, so he could see Sirius’s face, and how he was taking the news. His mouth was a straight line. He looked more tired than angry. He shook his head.

“Stupid prick.” He muttered. “It’s all *her*, you know. He’s an idiot for wanting to please her, obviously, but it’s all her fault, anyway.”

“Your mother?”

Sirius nodded. Remus didn’t know what to say. They had agreed, long ago - they could talk about anything but mothers. And that’s the way it had been, on Sirius’s side, anyway. Remus didn’t want to go into it now, either. Everything was so nice, and warm, and if they could just hang onto it a bit longer, then this would be such a good memory, something he would have inside him forever.

He reached over and stroked Sirius’s cheek, that perfect, *perfect* jawline. He sat up, and shifted around to face him.

“Let’s forget about all that shit.” He said, “It’s boring.”

Sirius kissed him.

* * *

4:00PM

Remus walked down alone for dinner at four, as Sirius left for his detention. It was so early that Remus was the only one there, except for Marlene, who was also attending Madam Pomfrey’s healing class.

“I’m glad you’re coming,” she beamed at him. Marlene smiled a lot these days. “I haven’t seen you properly since Christmas!”

“Yeah, sorry!” Remus replied, beginning his second helping of lasagne, twice as big as the first, “Been so busy with NEWTs stuff...”

“I really wanted to talk to you about what happened on the train...”

“Oh! ... er...” Remus stared at her, fork halfway to his mouth. With all of the fuss about Castor

and the full moon, Remus had been able to avoid talking about their strange meeting with Yasmin and Marlene on the train. He felt guilty again. Obviously Marlene had been thinking about it a lot.

“Hang on,” Marlene was saying, reaching for her wand, “*Muffliato* !” She murmured.

The noise in the hall around them seemed to deaden, slightly.

“What was that?” He asked, keeping his voice low.

“Stops people listening in.” Marlene explained, “Lily taught it to us. Mary uses it to gossip all the time in Charms.”

“Wow,” Remus nodded, appreciatively.

“So, anyway,” Marlene leaned forward on her elbows, eyes bright, “You and Sirius! Does anyone know?!”

“Oh!” Remus finally set down his knife and fork, though he could have happily kept going. “Yeah, actually. James and Peter, Lily too.”

“Really?!”

“Yeah.” He nodded, checking that there was definitely nobody listening. “Only recently, though. What about you and Yaz?”

“No one.” She said, firmly.

“Not even Mary?”

“Least of all her!” Marlene said, ruefully. Remus decided not to enquire further. He’d had enough revelations concerning Mary for one day.

“Has it been going on long? You two?” He asked. “I had no idea...”

“Sorry,” Marlene blushed, looking down, “I’ve known I was... different, I suppose, for a long time now, and I really wanted to say something to you, especially after the summer, but... I dunno, how do you bring it up?”

“Tell me about it.” Remus agreed, eagerly.

“Yaz has been my girlfriend since just before Christmas. She’s incredible.” Marlene was smiling again, and Remus could practically feel the joy radiating from her. He touched her hand, gently,

“I’m really happy for you.”

“Thanks.” She squeezed his hand back. “But what about you?! More to the point, what about *Sirius* ?!”

“What about him?”

“I’m just flabbergasted, really. Is he fully queer, or more AC-DC?”

“Um... you know, I haven’t asked. We don’t really talk about that sort of thing.”

“You don’t?” She gave him an odd, sideways glance. “Doesn’t it bother you? His history with girls?”

“No.” Remus felt himself growing hot under the collar. This was exactly the sort of thing he wanted to avoid discussing. With anyone. “It’s not relevant.”

“Ok,” Marlene shrugged, though she looked unconvinced. “If it works, I suppose.”

He didn’t respond to that, and eventually the *Muffliato* spell wore off and they finished eating, before making their way to their healing class at 4.30.

Marlene was planning to tell Mary, she said, when the time was right. Remus knew that argument well enough, and didn’t think it was really his place to offer advice. It was nice to know that someone else knew how he felt, at least - even just a little bit.

The healing class passed very slowly. Remus found that he was still pretty stoned, plus quite full, which made him sleepy. He tried to listen to Madam Pomfrey’s lecture on circulatory diagnostic spells, but his mind kept wandering, drifting back to his bed, and Sirius. The kindly nurse assumed he was just out of it because the moon was close, and didn’t chastise him as she usually might - he ought to have felt bad about that, but he was too happy daydreaming to worry too much.

* * *

6:30 PM

Remus hung back in the hospital wing and sat quietly in Madam Pomfrey’s office while she tidied a few things away, before the pair of them made their journey down to the Shack together. There would only be four more full moons at Hogwarts, after this one, Remus realised. He knew he would miss Poppy Pomfrey more than he could ever tell her. She would always be the first person who had ever tried to make him comfortable; the first person who ever thought they could help.

She bid him goodbye, and promised to return first thing in the morning, as always. He put on the same brave face he’d used when he was eleven, and waved to her cheerily from the bed as she closed the door. Alone, Remus stared at the floor for a bit, trying to recall his afternoon, and suppress the growing dread in the pit of his stomach. He got up and paced a bit, for something to do.

In time, the door creaked open once more, and James poked his head around the corner. He glanced around the room, before entering, looking just as awkward as he had that morning.

“Hiya, Moony,” he said, pushing his glasses up his nose nervously as he entered, “No Wormtail yet?”

“I think he had lines to do for McGonagall.” Remus said, sitting on the bed again.

“Right-o.” James nodded. He stood leaning against the wall.

They were completely silent for a good three minutes. Remus tried not to fidget, but the quiet was pretty unbearable - he and James had never been awkward before. Even after Remus came out, he was the first to swear that nothing had changed. But of course, now something really *had* changed; something which had shifted and skewed the dynamic. James was generally good at rolling with the punches, but it seemed he had a real blind spot when it came to Sirius Black.

“Lily wants to be an animagus, now.” James said, suddenly, clearly trying to crack the tension.

“Of course she does,” Remus smiled fondly, “Bet she masters it in half the time you lot took.”

“You’re not wrong.” James laughed, appreciatively.

But that only hit a dead end, and silence invaded the space between them once more. Remus swallowed, and watched James, who was looking at his feet. He had just made up his mind to speak - to make some joke, or ask about quidditch, when James looked up, suddenly, catching his eye.

“*Look-Moony-I’m-really-sorry-about-this-morning*.” He said, all in a rush, as if he’d been holding his breath. Remus blinked.

“*You’re* sorry?!”

“Yeah, I should have realised... you know, you two are. Um. Together. Going out. Whatever - I shouldn’t have been so surprised...”

“It’s ok, Prongs.” Remus said, kindly, “*I’m* sorry - we’ve been trying not to rub in in your face too much, and I swear nothing was happening this morning, I just sleep there sometimes.”

“See, that’s what i mean; you shouldn’t have to sneak around!” James burst out, “Really, it’s not a problem! You should sleep where you want to sleep.”

“Oh... ok, thank you.” Remus nodded.

“I don’t want things to be weird.” James said, helplessly.

“Me neither!” Remus insisted. “That’s the last thing I want - Sirius too. I just wanted to keep a low profile because... well he’s your best friend, and him and me seeing each other doesn’t mean...”

“I never thought it did!” James said, hurriedly. He had crossed the room now, his inherent good nature taking over as he sat down next to Remus on the bed, “And *you’re* my best friend too, Remus.”

Remus looked down at his hands, shyly.

“Christ, Potter,” he grinned, “Why’d you always have to be so perfect?”

“Born that way.” James shrugged, mirroring Remus’s grin. “Come here, tosser.” He pulled him in for a hug. Remus relaxed, finally. All was well.

At that moment, the door swung open once more, and Sirius sauntered into the room, closely followed by Peter.

“Oi!” Sirius barked, pointing at James, “Hands off my man.”

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Wake up and Make Love With Me' by Ian Dury & The Blockheads

- I googled, and it looks as though 'rock' (i.e. Brighton Rock/Blackpool Rock) is peculiarly British. It's a hard candy, similar to candy cane, which you buy at the seaside.
- Snatch is a particularly crude slang word for lady-bits.
- AC-DC (Alternate current/direct current) is '70s slang for bisexuality.

Seventh Year: Victims

Chapter Summary

The morning after the full moon...

Howling. Whining. Scents - animals, magic, mould. He had to get out. Hunt. Pack. Pack. The big one tried to stop him. The black one tackled him. But he had to get out. He was so hungry. So hungry...

“Remus?! Remus?? Wake up!”

His eyes snapped open as Sirius shook him roughly by the shoulders.

“Wha??”

“Are you ok?”

He was lying on his back, on the dusty shack floor. He was bleeding, but he didn’t know where from. Sirius was bleeding too. Remus tried to sit up, and winced as his head rattled and his back creaked.

“What happened?” He gasped, throat raw from howling - or screaming.

“Here,” Sirius helped him up, and over to the bed. He pulled out a goblet - Remus didn’t know where he’d got it - and whispered, “*Auguamenti*.” Sirius’s hands were shaking as water poured from his wand, and he handed it to Remus, who drank greedily, spilling it down his front. He knew something was wrong; he could smell the blood and the fear and the sunrise, but it was taking longer than usual for his human thoughts to come back to him; like waking up still drunk with a hangover to boot.

“What happened?” he asked again, frowning, “Are you hurt?”

“It’s fine,” Sirius shook his head. He looked very pale - not his usual aristocratic alabaster, but sickly, worried, yellowish with sweat. “You just nipped me a few times - you kept trying to get out.”

“Did I--?!” Remus grabbed him, suddenly, pulling his shirt. Sirius pushed him down, gently, reaching for blankets to cover him with. He shook his head,

“No, we kept you here. You never left, I promise you.”

“Where are the others?”

“They had to go - Madam Pomfrey’ll be here soon. When you turned back it was different - harder than normal, I think. You wouldn’t wake up properly, so James left me the cloak. I didn’t want to leave you here.”

Remus lay back, his mind racing. He tried to remember, but it was all scrambled up. He only knew one thing for sure.

“Something really bad happened.” He whispered. His own voice was trembling now, and cold dread settled in his stomach like a sickness. Sirius didn’t say anything. He just squeezed his hand.

He hid under the cloak as soon as Madam Pomfrey arrived, and she hurried in, with a terrible grey look on her own face. He sat up, every muscle screaming at him,

“Poppy!” He rasped, “What happened? Please tell me!”

“How are you, first?” She asked, coming over to feel his forehead, “You’re running very high.”

“I feel fine,” he lied, batting her hand away impatiently, “There was an attack, wasn’t there?”

She nodded, wordlessly. His heart thumped, “Who? How many?”

“I don’t know.” She said, very quietly. He had never heard that voice come out of her before. For a moment, she wouldn’t even meet his eyes. She had always looked him in the eye.

“Please.” He said again. She shook her head, very slightly.

“There’s nothing I can tell you. It’ll be in the morning news.”

“I have to see Dumbledore!”

“He’s not here.” She stood up, “Now, can you walk? Professor McGonagall says you’re to go to your lessons as usual, if you’re fit enough? We don’t want anyone asking where you are. I’ll give you something for the pain.”

They walked through the tunnel in silence, with Sirius behind them, still invisible. Madam Pomfrey dealt with the worst of his scratches - mostly from Padfoot, though fortunately she assumed he’d done them to himself - and told him to carry on about his day. He took the potion she gave him, but his head still throbbed and his body ached. As soon as she had turned a corner, Sirius revealed himself, and slid an arm around Remus’s back.

“Why are you pretending you’re ok?” He hissed, supporting Remus up the stairs back to their dorm, “You can barely walk!”

“I’ll be fine in a minute.” Remus replied, gritting his teeth, “She’s got enough to worry about. Ugh, fucking stairs.”

“James said he’d send an owl to his dad right away,” Sirius said, as they slowly traversed the marble staircase, “If anyone knows what’s happened, the Potters will.”

“Yeah,” Remus nodded, wheezing, “Good...” But he knew that it was all no good. Whatever had happened, had happened, and it had been just as awful as Castor promised. It was the end of any chance of civility for the werewolves.

Back in the dorm room, James was still waiting for a reply from his parents. Remus sat down on his bed, heavily, chest heaving, every part of him aching, his skin on fire.

“You could just bunk off,” Sirius said, awkwardly, glancing at the others, “We do it all the time.”

Remus shook his head. He hauled himself up, clutching the bed frame.

“Can’t risk it. We’ve got Arithmancy first, Snape’s in that - if the papers are full of werewolf attacks and I’m not there, what d’you want to bet he’ll be the first to start stirring? I’m going for a shower, just a minute.”

He could hear the other three marauders whispering loudly through the bathroom door, but he hadn't the energy to focus on anything except getting through the next six hours. He turned on the taps and let the hissing water drown them out.

* * *

WEREWOLF ATTACKS - MAGICAL COMMUNITY DEMANDS ACTION!

Hundreds were affected by a string of brutal werewolf attacks during last night's full moon which left fifteen wizards dead and at least five missing - presumed kidnapped. None of the creatures responsible have been identified as yet, and the Auror's office has advised everyone to be on high alert, and to consult the published ministry guidelines on identifying and approaching werewolves, which are classified XXXXX and considered highly dangerous.

The interim minister for magic has been criticised for failure to maintain the Werewolf Register, established by Newt Scamander in 1947. Speaking for the opposition, Abraxas Malfoy released a statement in the early hours of this morning:

"Last night's attacks are further proof that the ministry is in dire need of reform, and on behalf of the ancient and law abiding magical families of Great Britain we demand stricter sanctions on half humans and other undesirable and potentially dangerous elements."

This statement has provoked outrage in what insiders are describing as an increasingly divided ministry..."

"No names." James muttered darkly. "That's not good."

"Protecting the victims' families?" Sirius suggested.

"Since when has the Daily Prophet cared about that?" Lily hissed, venomously. "Since when has the ministry?!"

"Careful what you say!" Peter whispered, his eyes wide, "My cousin who works at the *Prophet* said they're being sent really strict guidelines on what they can write - about the ministry, the war, anything - and there are spies everywhere checking on them, making sure no one's being too critical."

This made everyone go quiet, and Lily looked around nervously, glancing over her shoulder. It didn't matter; everyone in the Great Hall seemed to be talking about the same thing, huddled in groups over newspapers, whispering amongst themselves.

"It's not as if we're disagreeing with what the paper says," Marlene whispered, leaning forward, "I hate Malfoy's politics as much as the next half-blood, but he's right about the failures of the register. The werewolves need to be contained, or stuff like this will happen, dark lord or not!"

"That's ridiculous!" Sirius scoffed, "An organised attack like this only happens when there's someone behind it, this would never happen without Voldemort goading them."

Everyone winced as he said the name. Remus had noticed that happening more and more, as the list of missing grew and people trusted each other less.

"They're still dangerous." Marlene replied. "I don't see why we're pretending they aren't - it says right here," she jabbed the black and white print, "Classified XXXXX. I know it's unfortunate for

them, they might have been perfectly normal otherwise, but facts are facts.”

No one said anything to that.

Remus doing his best to ignore all of them. He was busy writing a letter to Professor Ferox, who was the only person he could think of who had been in potential danger last night. Livia knew him; he had attacked her once, and Remus thought she seemed like the sort of person to hold a grudge. Besides, writing gave him something to distract himself from how dreadful he felt; aching and shivery all over. He knew he looked awful too, and thought it best to keep his head down.

“She doesn’t know what she’s talking about.” Lily whispered to him, on their way out of the Hall. “Marls just sees everything as black and white. Don’t take it personally,”

“I don’t.” Remus replied, tiredly, “I’m fine, don’t worry about me.”

Still, he was dreading Care of Magical Creatures later that morning, when he’d have to sit next to Marlene. He’d cast a glamour to cover up his newer scars, and was sipping on a *Pepper Up* potion as if it was keeping him alive, but he couldn’t hide the fact that he was utterly exhausted. Not to mention the bone crushing guilt he felt over the attacks. He’d *known* they were going to happen. He’d told Dumbledore, but it hadn’t been enough, he ought to have done more.

Arithmancy wasn’t too bad; he had Sirius, James and Lily in that, and they formed a protective huddle around him, taking their seats at the back of the class. The exercises were almost impossible to do, Remus found his mind oddly fractured; unable to hold down a thought for very long. James and Sirius fell into their usual clownish mischief, creating a satisfactory distraction any time the teacher glanced up at Remus. He was so grateful, especially as they had both been up all night too.

Afterwards, Sirius walked him to Care of Magical Creatures, as he had a free hour, and Remus hadn’t the energy to refuse. The hallways were too busy for him to risk leaning on the other boy for support, so they just went slowly.

“Just bunk off?” Sirius pleaded, watching him struggle down the third flight of stairs, “You’ve shown your face, Snivellus has seen you...”

Remus just shook his head, carrying on doggedly. As he reached the bottom, a couple of third year boys rushed past, shouting at each other and laughing. One of them bumped into Remus with his bag, which would have been nothing on a good day, but at that moment was exactly the wrong thing, and knocked Remus sideways into the bannister. He bit his lip as the left side of his body hit the hard stone, but couldn’t help letting out a gasp of pain.

“*Syrtis-corpius!*” Sirius yelled, pulling his wand out and firing the hex at all three boys. They yelped as the marble staircases turned to quicksand beneath them, and began to swallow them up. Sirius only stopped it when their legs were dangling through the bottom and they were both trapped halfway. “Watch where you’re going!” He said, menacingly, before helping Remus down the last few steps.

No one intervened - no one ever did when it was Sirius - and Remus was too focussed on getting to his lesson on time.

“Promise me you’ll go back and free them?” He asked, as they neared the classroom, “I don’t need you getting a detention on top of everything...”

“If someone else hasn’t found them,” Sirius shrugged. “I only taught them a lesson, any prefect

would have done the same.”

Remus usually would have found that funny, but he felt as though *he* was wading through quicksand too, his limbs heavy and slow, everything around him foggy and blurred. “Right,” Sirius was saying, “I’ll be back here in an hour to get you.”

“I don’t need collecting, I’m not a child.” Remus muttered.

“No,” Sirius squeezed his hand, very quickly, “You’re my Moony.”

He made a mental note to save that up for later, when he was alone, and could bask in the thought of being Sirius’s anything. Just now he hated himself too much to allow anyone to be kind.

Care of Magical Creatures was worse than he could have imagined. His temperature was running even higher from the exertion, and he had to keep wiping sweat from his eyes, hair sticking to his forehead. Despite breakfast having been only an hour earlier, his stomach felt like an empty cavern, growling intermittently. His head ached and his vision swam, but he sat bolt upright, staring fixedly at the blackboard.

They were supposed to be doing dragons - identifying the various species and their individual properties. Kettleburn began the lesson as he always did, with a terrifying and usually harrowing story of an encounter he’d had with whichever creature they were discussing. Today was no different, and the battle-scarred professor was in his element today - he had lost two limbs to dragons.

Despite this animated tale, only half of the class was actually paying attention (you could tell by the look of faint horror on their faces as they scribbled down notes). The other half - Marlene and Mary included - was busy reading the chapter in their textbooks which concerned werewolves.

“There’s something a bit sexy about the whole beast-man thing, though,” Mary whispered across Remus, who began to feel light-headed.

“Mary!” Marlene hissed, angrily, “That’s completely insensitive, people *died* !”

“I’m just saying!”

“You wouldn’t think that, anyway, if you met a real one! I spoke to Sian Bolsh over the summer; she left last year for healer training, and she’s been shadowing a healer on the lycanthropy ward at St. Mungo’s. They have awful hygiene, most of them, because they can’t live near normal wizards, and they basically live off hand-outs and charity--”

“Well then I feel sorry for them!” Mary snapped back, “That sounds horrible, wizards are so heartless.”

“You’re being deliberately dense! They’re not *safe* --”

“Excuse me, Professor Kettleburn,” the whole class turned to see McGonagall standing in the doorway. Remus’s stomach dropped - had she come for him? Had the *ministry* finally come for him?!

The head of Gryffindor house looked very grave, and was holding a letter in her hand, but she did not look at Remus. “I am sorry to interrupt. Marlene McKinnon, may I speak to you?”

Marlene frowned and stood up, setting her quill back into the inkwell. She threw a confused glance back at Mary and Remus before following Professor McGonagall out of the room. The door closed

and everyone stared at it in silence.

“She can’t be in trouble,” Mary whispered to Remus, “She’s too goody-goody.”

Remus mumbled something, but his hunger had turned into queasiness and he didn’t want to open his mouth. He wished he could take off his cloak, the room was so stuffy and hot; he was getting uncomfortably damp under his armpits and across his back. “Are you all right, sweetheart?” Mary asked, her face concerned. “You look like you’re going to puke, is it Kettleburn’s horrid stories?”

“Mmmph.” Remus nodded very slightly, shooting pains firsting up his neck as he did so. He rested his forehead in his hands, hoping he just looked like he was really interested in his notes.

There was no room for Mary to probe him anymore, though. A horrible shriek sounded outside the classroom, followed by a chilling moan of absolute despair. Mary was on her feet at once, and flew out of the room to see her friend. Remus caught only a glimpse as the door swung open and shut, of Marlene on her knees, sobbing, and McGonagall bent over her, patting her shoulders.

Even Kettleburn was rendered mute for a few minutes, before regaining his composure, and clearing his throat.

“We’re living in difficult times,” he said, quite out of character, “I urge you all to be kind to each other, especially as you prepare to leave Hogwarts.”

The lesson continued after that, much subdued, and it took all of Remus’s concentration to stay conscious in his seat, now that he was alone on his desk. About fifteen minutes before the class was due to end, there was a second knock at the door.

“Enter!” Kettleburn barked. The door opened, and Lily walked in,

“Good morning, professor, I’ve just come to collect Marlene’s things for her.”

Kettleburn nodded and gestured at Marlene’s desk, where her work was still spread out, her book bag hanging off the back of her chair. Lily went over and quickly started gathering things together. She took one look at Remus and raised her head, “Sorry, professor - could I ask Remus to come with me? I didn’t realise Mary left all of her bits too...”

“Of course, of course,” Kettleburn nodded, distractedly, labelling a diagram of a dragon’s lair on the board. “Chapters eighteen to twenty five for next lesson, please, Mr Lupin.”

“Yes sir,” Remus croaked, picking up Mary’s bag. Thank god it wasn’t heavy. And thank god for Lily Evans.

As soon as they were outside in the corridor, Remus leaned heavily against the wall and closed his eyes.

“Oh, Remus,” Lily said, anxiously, raising a cool hand to his forehead, “You look dreadful!”

“I’m fine.” He mumbled, uselessly, eyes still shut, “Just give me a second... is Marlene...?”

“She’s gone home.” Lily lowered her voice, though they were quite alone, “Her brother, Danny, was attacked last night. St. Mungo’s started realising names.”

Remus’s head swam; he opened his eyes only to see black spots, and closed them again, in case he fainted,

“Is he...”

“He’s alive. But... it doesn’t sound very good.”

The guilt was overwhelming, roaring in Remus’s ears. How would he ever look Marlene in the eye again? “Come on,” Lily took his arm and draped it over her shoulders. She fitted very snugly, but he didn’t dare lean on her too much, “I’m taking you to the tower, you’re in no state for school. I’ll say you’re helping me pack for Marlene.”

“Someone ought to tell--” He was about to say Yasmin, but realised that it was still a secret.

“...Madam Pomfrey.” He finished, lamely, “Marlene’s going to miss healing lessons.”

“I’m sure she already knows,” Lily replied, briskly, “Come along, now.”

She was a lot harder to refuse than Sirius.

Seventh Year: Sunday Afternoon

Sunday 29th January 1978

“Moony?”

“Mmm?”

“It’s after midday…”

“So?”

“Thought you might fancy getting up?”

“...no thanks.”

“Can I come in?”

“...no.”

“...ok, then.” Sirius began to walk away, and Remus’s stomach flipped.

“I’m sorry.” He said, loud enough for Sirius to hear, and stop. Remus finally crawled out of the covers. “I do want you here, I just don’t know what to say.”

He could hear Sirius fidgeting, his hands in his pockets, then running through his hair. Finally,

“We don’t have to talk?”

Remus sighed. He was a mess; he hadn’t washed properly since Wednesday, and had only got out of bed to use the bathroom. The other boys had been feeding him by passing food through the crack in his curtains, and if they hadn’t Remus wasn’t sure if he’d have eaten at all. He was in the worst state he’d ever been in. But he missed Sirius.

“...ok then.”

The curtains parted and Remus scowled against the bright daylight, but Sirius crawled in quickly, closing them again. He looked at Remus, but he didn’t look too hard before shuffling down next to him and enveloping him in his arms.

“Thanks,” he breathed against Remus’s hair, “for letting me in.”

“Reckon I must stink.”

Sirius inhaled deeply, tickling Remus’s forehead and making him squirm.

“Nope, just smell like Moony.”

“Gerroff, mutt.” Remus wriggled away from him.

“Feel like getting up soon? Everyone’s worried. And they’re looking at *me* now, like *I* know what to do, because everyone knows about us, which is weird, and quite a lot of pressure, really.”

Remus chuckled, and it felt strange, but good. Still, he had a melancholic episode to maintain.

“I still don’t feel like getting up.”

“Ok, then you need to let me hide here with you, because I’m not going back out there.”

“*Sirius.*”

“*Re mus.*” Sirius frowned at him, exaggerating his eyebrows to look stupid.

“Stop it.” Remus folded his arms, aware he was starting to sound like a sulky child.

“I will not.” Sirius poked him in the ribs, “Come on, I know you’re feeling like shit about everything, but did you ever consider that it’s not for *you* to hog all of the misery like this? That maybe if you talk to your friends it might not all seem quite so bleak?”

Remus frowned up at him, arms still crossed.

“Maybe that works for you...”

“Are you saying this is working for you?”

Remus pressed his lips together. They stared each other out for a minute. Remus began to think he’d quite like to fight Sirius right now, like they did on full moons; just because it was a fun way to expel energy. Then he noticed something. He sniffed the air.

“Are you bleeding? I can smell blood.”

“Probably you, from the moon.”

“No, I’ve healed already, I never have open wounds longer than a day.”

“Bloody hell,” Sirius laughed, lightly, “How is it possible for you to get *any* cooler?!”

“And it’s your blood, I can tell.”

“There you go again! You’re basically a superhero.”

“*Sirius!*”

“Ok, ok,” he sat up, running his hands through his hair. “You swiped at me a few times over the moon, I told you that, we did it to each other. And you can’t turn me when I’m a dog, we’ve tested that enough times.”

“But you’re still bleeding?! It was almost a week ago! You need to go to Madam Pomfrey!”

“Oh yeah, and say my werewolf boyfriend scratched me while I was in dog form as an illegal animagus?!”

“Jesus.” Remus groaned, hauling himself up and out of bed, grabbing Sirius by the wrist and pulling him along.

“Where are we going?!”

“I need better light!”

He yanked open the bathroom door and slammed down the lid of the toilet. “Sit.” He instructed. Sirius complied, half smiling.

Remus opened the little mirror cabinet above the sink, digging out murtlap essence and disinfectant and gauze and cotton balls. (He had found over years of trial and error that a combination of magical and muggle things worked best. As with almost everything else.) He pulled his wand out of his pyjama bottoms and stood in front of Sirius.

“Ok. Show me.”

Sirius dropped his head, no longer enjoying Remus’s newfound motivation. He sighed heavily and lifted his shirt, saying,

“It's not that *bad*...”

It wasn’t as bad as Remus had feared, but it still made his stomach clench when he saw. Three dark red stripes, across Sirius’s ribs. They were starting to heal, but he knew he could fix it fairly easily. He took a deep breath, met Sirius’s eye, and then reached for the disinfectant. Then his wand. Remus was pretty good at healing cuts now, and the scab and the redness were gone in an instant. Now they were white stripes.

“I’m so sorry,” he said, mournfully. “It was a magical wound. You’ll have a scar there for the rest of your life, now.”

Sirius looked down at the mark, then up again.

“That's fine, Remus.” He said, quietly.

* * *

So, Remus rejoined the group, at Sirius’s goading, and they were all kind enough to pretend he had merely been unwell, and not avoiding them. The news over the past few days had been particularly grim. First the *Prophet* had published a list of the dead, and their photographs. Then they had published a list of those ‘presumed bitten’, along with *their* photographs, which had provoked outcry among some of the more liberal commentators, and ignited a debate on mandatory registration for all werewolves.

Greyback’s name had not been mentioned, nor any other werewolf that Remus was aware of. It was as if the horrific crimes simply happened one night, and the assailants had vanished into thin air. No one had heard from Marlene, either, though Danny McKinnon was one of those named in the papers.

He’d been given a full four inches of text, by virtue of his celebrity as beater for the Chudley Cannons. The team’s manager was interviewed and quoted saying that while he had not yet been briefed on the details Danny’s condition, the Cannons operated a ‘zero-tolerance’ policy to ‘half-breeds and dangerous creatures’, and would deal with any allegations of infection accordingly. James vowed that he would never see a Chudley Cannons game again, but Remus mostly felt sorry for Danny.

They tried to put all of this misery behind them, and went down for Sunday lunch (and thank goodness; it was generally Remus’s favourite meal of the week, and he’d have been even more blue if he’d missed it), then spent the rest of the evening cosied up in the common room in front of the fire. Remus even acquiesced to a chess game with Peter, who was thrilled.

“You know what we ought to start getting serious about,” Sirius mused, sorting through his record collection.

“NEWTs?” Remus asked, hopefully, as Peter captured his knight.

“Job applications?” Lily said, from the arm chair, where she sat in James’s lap, reading a magazine.

“The quidditch cup?” James suggested.

“For goodness sake,” Sirius tiutted, “I’m ashamed to call you all marauders.”

“What?!” All three of them frowned, offended. Peter chuckled,

“He’s talking about the big prank on Slytherin. You know, we started planning it before christmas.”

“Wormy-boy, you are without a doubt my very favourite person.” Sirius grinned broadly. Peter snorted,

“Bugger off,” and promptly captured Remus’s queen.

“Ugh. I don’t know why I bother, haven’t beaten you since I was thirteen.” Remus sighed, leaning back on the rug on his elbows. He looked up at Sirius, “Well then? Got a plan?”

“Maybe. Whatever we do, I think we should focus the attack on the dungeons.”

“Let’s not throw around words like ‘attack’,” Lily said, hurriedly, “This is just a practical joke, right? In the wholesome spirit of harmless house rivalry?”

“If you like,” Sirius shrugged, half ignoring the interjection. “Anyway, Moony, I thought your study group was in on this? What’s the point in you having all these minions if you can’t make them work for you?”

“Oh my god, for the last time, they are not my ‘minions’!” Remus rolled his eyes. “Anyway, we’ve not had a proper study group yet this term. I’ve been ever so slightly busy.”

“Well, as none of us are scheduled to be in mortal peril for the next month or so,” Sirius replied, “I think we ought to get cracking. Everyone could do with a laugh, eh? Assemble the troops, we’ll meet sometime next week.”

“As long as it doesn’t clash with quidditch,” James yawned, “I’m there. Right, I’m off to bed, Transfiguration first thing.”

The others all glanced up at the clock, or began to yawn themselves and agreed to follow suit. The common room was clearing out now, anyway, and they were some of the last to leave.

Remus had just got his pyjamas on and brushed his teeth, when he remembered that he’d left his book downstairs. While that didn’t usually matter, this particular book was *Maurice*, by E.M. Forster, and though the cover was nondescript, he was a bit concerned that if someone picked it up and read the blurb there would be raised eyebrows.

Sighing, he left the bathroom and hurried downstairs, muttering, “Getting my book.” to Sirius, who was next in the queue.

He had just grabbed the book and was about to head back up, when he heard the portrait hole slide open. He turned to see Mary enter. She was wearing a short, spangly silver dress, and she tripped on her way in, but caught herself and giggled.

“All right?” He called to her.

She looked up, squinting a bit in the dim light.

“Hiya, sexy,” she grinned, wandering in a bit unsteady on her feet. Might have been the four inch heels she was wearing. Or it might have been the Witches Brew Remus could smell wafting off her.

“Hello, been somewhere?” He walked back towards the couches, wanting to make sure she was all right before leaving.

“Pfffff.” She waved a hand, collapsing into the nearest armchair, spreading her legs out. Her short dress rode up her thighs, but she didn’t seem bothered, “Just a few drinks in the Ravenclaw common room.”

“Thought you were seeing a Hufflepuff?”

“Mm, he was there.” She exhaled, smiling, tilted her head back and closed her eyes. The lids were painted gold, finely rimmed with kohl. She looked like an Egyptian queen in a party frock. “But a *lot* of people were there, I s’pose.”

She sounded sad. Remus sat down in the armchair opposite her, clutching the book in his lap.

“Are you ok, Mary?”

“Oh. Fine.” She opened her eyes, slowly, and smiled at him. She wasn’t that drunk, he realised, but she looked tired, and deeply unhappy. “Just stuff on my mind. Boys being wankers. Poor Marlene.”

“Have you heard from her?”

Mary shook her head, then sat up, blinking.

“Haven’t got a fag, have you sweetheart? I don’t usually, but I just really fancy one.”

“Yeah,” Remus reached in his pockets for his matchbox, where he kept the cigarettes he had rolled himself. He slid it open, “Normal or fun?”

“Oooh, fun, please,” she purred, reaching over, “Might help me sleep.”

“Um, about Marlene,” Remus said, lighting his own, “I just had a thought, er... you know her friend Yaz? Have you seen her about? I wasn’t sure if anyone told her--”

“I did.” Mary said, exhaling, watching Remus through the smoke beneath her heavy golden eyelids. “I told her.”

“Oh!” Remus blinked, surprised. “That’s good, then.”

“Mmm, I thought she had better know,” Mary mused, pulling a strand of her hair and winding it coyly around her little finger. “Didn’t want her to think Marls had gone cold on her.”

Remus took a quick, sharp puff on his cigarette, frowning very slightly.

“What do you mean?”

Mary laughed, arching back in the chair, showing her pearly white teeth. She let the curl of hair spring back into place like a corkscrew.

“Oh come on, Remus,” she shook her head, “*I know.* ”

“You... she told you?”

“No,” Mary conceded, settling back down with a sigh, “But I’m not thick, despite rumours to the contrary. At least, I know what *romance* looks like.” She arched her eyebrow, “I’m not as dense as James, for example. How long did he take to figure it out?”

“He doesn’t know about Marlene,” Remus replied, “They must keep it quiet during quidditch stuff.”

“I’m not talking about Marlene, now. I’m talking about you.”

“Me?!”

“He’s a good kisser, isn’t he?” She winked at him. “But then, you were too, I seem to remember.”

“How...?!”

“Mm, I’ve suspected for a little while now. Just little things. All the time you spend together. His being single for more than five minutes. I wasn’t a hundred percent sure, but you’ve just confirmed it for me.”

“Bugger.”

She laughed again, a friendly, trilling sound.

“Silly boy.” She smiled affectionately, playing with her hair again as she smoked. She looked at him again, her eyes more focussed. When she spoke, her voice was more serious than normal. “It’s fine if you want to keep it quiet. I was going to wait, to see if you told me yourself - like I’m doing with Marls. But. I just wanted to let you know... I know I’ve got this reputation for being a bit of a big mouth, but I *can* keep a secret, ok? Especially for my friends. And if...” She bit her lip, “If there’s anything else you’re keeping secret, Remus, then you can trust me, ok? It doesn’t change anything.”

This was almost too many revelations for one evening. Remus sucked hard on his cigarette, and half wished he’d opted for a spliff too.

“What are you saying?” He asked, very carefully. “Do you think you know something... else?”

“Remus.” She sat up. “The scars? Being ill every full moon? We do the same Care of Magical Creatures class.”

“You can’t tell anyone.” Remus said, his voice very low, even though they were completely alone. “Please, Mary... me and Sirius, that’s one thing, but *this*... I could get kicked out of school. I could get arrested!”

“Hey!” Mary stood up, quickly, and came over to sit on the arm of the chair, “I’m not going to tell! That’s what I’m trying to explain.” She wound an arm around his shoulder. “Makes no difference to me, I swear.”

“Really?”

“Honestly.” She kissed his cheek and gave him a squeeze. “So don’t take what happened to Marlene’s brother so hard, eh? It was nothing to do with you.”

“She’d never forgive me, if she knew...” Remus said, sadly. Mary handed him what was left of the

joint and he puffed on it gratefully.

“Don’t worry about that,” She said, flippantly, “She’ll come around. She knows who you really are. And maybe you could help? You could write to Danny, even - I bet he could do with a friend.”

“That’s--” Remus was about to say that while it was a really nice idea, it was almost impossible, considering the fact that he was unregistered, and it would be a bad idea to draw attention to himself.

“Mooony, where are you?” Sirius’s plaintive voice came clattering down the stairs, “I can smell the pot all the way from here, you’re not being subtle-- oh! Hiya MacDonald.”

“Black,” Mary nodded, still perched on the arm of Remus’s chair, “Sorry, I’m trying to seduce your boyfriend.”

“Oh yeah, I’d like to see you -- wait, my *what* ?!”

She just poked out her tongue at him. He looked at Remus, “Are we just telling everyone, now?!”

“Oi!” Mary hopped off the seat, “I’m not ‘everyone’! Arrogant tosser. Don’t forget I had you both first.”

Remus couldn’t help laughing at the look on Sirius’s face, and got out of the chair, sheepishly, still clutching *Maurice* ,

“Sorry, I’ll come up now, we were just chatting.” He looked back at Mary, “Will you be ok?”

“Fine,” She nodded, smiling, “I’m off to bed too. Night lads!”

“Good night!”

Back upstairs in the warm glow of their dorm room, Peter was already snoring softly behind his curtains, and James was sitting cross legged on his bed, flipping through his quidditch notebook.

“Thought we’d lost you, Moony,” he whispered, cheerily, as the two boys entered.

“Bumped into Mary, she’s been at some party with the Ravenclaws.”

“See, this is what happens when you get stuck with the Head Boy *and* the Head Girl in your house,” Sirius sighed, leaning back on his own bed, “All the fun happens elsewhere.”

“Oh, stop whinging,” James grinned, closing his book, “We’ll have more parties and you know it. Now go to bed like a good boy.”

“Fine,” Sirius yawned, falling backwards dramatically, so that he disappeared through the heavy velvet hangings.

“G’night then,” Remus started, making for his own bed, but Sirius’s hand shot out and grabbed his wrist.

“Moony...” he whispered, softly, from the shadows behind the veil. Remus bit his lip and glanced over at James, who looked away, awkwardly, and began to draw his own bed curtains across. Oh well. Fuck it.

“Mmm... ok...” Remus let Sirius pull him inside.

Seventh Year: Valentine's Day 1978

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

You think I'm a lame duck

But I don't give a blue fuck

So you leave me like crazy

Drive me to be lazy.

I love you, you big dummy!

I love you you big dummy!

Monday 13th February 1978

“You know,” Lily yawned, “Other boyfriends might take the night before Valentine’s day to plan something nice for their girlfriends, rather than an assault on other students.”

“Thought we were calling it a practical joke, Evans,” Sirius winked. “Anyway, how do you know what other boys are doing? We’re the only boys you know, and we’re doing this.”

“Touchè.” Lily poked her tongue out at him from where she sat cross legged on James’s bed.

“And,” James said, sitting on the floor beside Remus, folding envelopes as fast as Remus could stuff them, “How do you know I haven’t *already* planned something nice?!”

“When do you have the time?” She shrugged, “Whenever you’re not with me you’re playing quidditch.”

“I can multi-task,” he said, haughtily, a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

Remus gave James a sideways glance. He couldn’t account for any of James’s free time either, but it was best never to underestimate James Potter.

“How about you, Pete?” Mary asked, sitting on James’s other side, neatly stacking the envelopes he handed her and ticking names off the list, “Big plans for tomorrow?”

“Nope.” Peter replied, glumly. He was lying on his stomach on his bed, frantically completing the Charms notes due for the next day. He’d dropped a few hints to Remus about copying them, but Remus had pretended not to understand and eventually poor Wormtail had dropped it and just resigned himself to doing a poor job.

“What about Dorcas?” Mary pressed.

“Dumped me.”

“Aw, poor love.” She cooed, “At least I won’t be the only single one.”

“Really?” Pete looked up, hopefully.

“Yep, dumped that stupid Hufflepuff.” Mary nodded, bent over her work.

“Oh well, if you fancied dinner, maybe...” Peter started. Mary shook her head,

“Oh no, sorry Pete, I’m triple booked as it is; it’ll be a miracle if none of them bump into each other.”

“Oh.” Peter returned to his homework, looking even more depressed than before. Lily stifled a giggle, but Mary seemed oblivious.

“Cheer up Pete, we still love you.” Remus offered, stuffing his very last envelope and handing it to James. “Me and Padfoot’ll have dinner with you.”

“So basically exactly the same as every other night of the year.” Sirius teased.

“You two not doing anything, then?” Mary asked, casually. It felt like a loaded question, all the same, and Remus found it hard to ignore the glances his friends were now shooting at each other. He looked up at Sirius and said, very firmly,

“Don’t even think about it.”

Sirius’s face cracked into a smile,

“I think Valentine’s Day is Moony’s idea of hell.”

“Exactly.” Remus nodded, solemnly. Let the girls have flowers and hearts. He had plenty else going on, thank you very much.

“Aww, I think that’s a shame,” Mary said, crossing the last name off her list and stretching her legs out on the rug, lying back on her elbows. “Valentine’s Day can be nice, if you do it right.”

Remus smirked at her. ‘Doing it right’ to Mary meant receiving votive offerings from her various acolytes; a fantasy in which she was Aphrodite, and all would pay homage.

“Nope, not interested.” He said, stretching his own stiff legs. “Just a normal day.”

“*Sirius* likes it.” Mary said, slyly, “He was always dead romantic.”

“When we weren’t fighting.” Sirius interjected. Remus looked at him, and realised he had never actually considered whether or not the other boy was interested in celebrating the day. He’d just assumed they were on the same page.

“Anyway, that was different.” Peter mused, sucking the nib of his quill and getting ink on his lip.

“What was?” Mary asked.

“When Padfoot was going out with you.” Peter replied. “Obviously he did all the mushy stuff then.”

“Obviously?” Lily spoke up. Remus cringed. he could see where this was going. the redhead had her hackles up; it didn’t happen often, but when it did it always ended in a scolding. “What do you mean, Peter?”

Peter saw it coming too, but bless him, he tried to explain himself.

"I wasn't being nasty," he said, "It's just... well it's not the same thing, is it?"

"Yes it is!" Mary frowned.

James was clearly annoyed too. Remus sighed, inwardly. He looked up at Sirius, who shrugged at him. Remus held out his hand, and Sirius hopped off the bed to take it, pulling Remus to his feet. Remus cleared his throat.

"If you've all finished discussing our relationship amongst yourselves?"

They all looked up, sheepishly.

"Sorry, Moony,

"Sorry Remus."

"Let's move on, shall we?" Remus raised an eyebrow, and leaned against his bed post with his hands in his pockets. He nodded at the pile of sealed envelopes, "We need to pass those around tomorrow, as soon as. I think probably best to do it at breakfast, so it gets mixed in with the regular post and doesn't look suspicious."

This was met with a murmur of general agreement.

"Don't forget, the ink only becomes legible when the right person gives their name." Remus continued. He went over to his bedside table for his matchbox of cigarettes and slid one out.

"That was such a good idea, I can't believe you did it so quickly." Mary said. She didn't know that the spell they'd used was exactly the same as the one on the Marauder's Map, and they weren't going to tell her.

"You are in the presence of greatness, MacDonald." Sirius said, taking Remus's cigarette the second he'd lit it. Remus sighed and pulled out another.

"At least open a window if you have to smoke in here," James sighed.

"We have to smoke in here," Sirius said, flicking his wand at the windows so that they flung wide open. "Because our poxy Head Boy banned smoking in the common room."

"All the prefects voted on that, actually." Lily said, wryly.

"See, Moony," Sirius nudged him with his hip, "This is why you should have stayed a prefect, you could have been the voice of dissent."

"Truly tragic." Remus exhaled smoke.

"Right, I'm off to bed, then." Mary said, getting up, lifting the pile of invitations and setting them down on James's trunk. "I'm looking forward to this, be nice to have something else to think about."

"I'll come with you." Lily said, getting up too.

"Shall I walk you back?" James leapt to his feet. Both girls giggled, as if he had said something charming, rather than ridiculous,

"I'll keep her safe on the arduous journey across the common room, Potter." Mary teased.

Still Lily and James spent the next five minutes bidding each other goodbye, which involved a lot of snogging. When Mary finally managed to drag her friend away, Lily was pink and grinning,

“Love you!” She called on her way down the stairs,

“Love you too!” James called back.

Sirius began to make sick noises, which made Peter start laughing, but Remus just watched James’s dopey expression. He hadn’t heard them say ‘I love you’ before. He didn’t think he’d ever heard anyone say it, actually; not anyone he cared about, at least. He’d seen it written down. In books, and in the letter from Hope. But neither of those things had felt as tangible as this. How long had they been saying that? As long as they’d been feeling it? Was it hard to say the first time? Remus thought it must be. Like casting a patronus.

He finished his cigarette in a contemplative mood while the others moved around him, finishing homework and changing for bed. He supposed he could ask Sirius about the whole ‘love’ thing, but he wasn’t sure he wanted to open that can of worms. They were happy as they were, weren’t they? It was just getting comfortable, now that their friends knew. Plus, after two years of pining and almost a year of secrecy, Remus wanted to just enjoy what they had, without all of that prescriptive stuff hanging over them.

Remus knew from experience that it was best to resist the temptation to pick things like that apart. Especially something as precious and hard won as he and Sirius had. The problem was; once you started, you might never remember how it worked in the first place.

He brushed his teeth still thinking, and wandered towards Sirius’s bed to sit and wait for him.

“Finished!” Peter cried, raising his quill with a flourish. “*Finally*.”

“Well done, Pete.” James yawned, climbing into bed.

“I didn’t get to help you lot, though.” Peter said, looking at the pile of envelopes wistfully.

“That’s ok, this is only preliminary work.” Remus offered, “The *real* planning starts on Wednesday.”

“Exactly.” James nodded encouragingly, “Anyway, don’t feel bad, Padfoot didn’t help either.”

“Oi!” Sirius came out of the bathroom at that moment, “I *wrote* the damn things! Where would you lot be without my beautiful penmanship? And I don’t recall Mrs Prongs doing anything either.”

He had taken to calling Lily this in private (he wouldn’t dare to her face) with the full knowledge that it annoyed James. The messy haired boy just rolled over in bed, flicking his middle finger in Sirius’s direction. Sirius chuckled and got into his own bed. Remus got in too, still deep in thought.

“Night lads!” Sirius called, drawing the curtains shut.

“Night!” Peter and James echoed back.

In the dark, Sirius held Remus’s hand, and they smiled at each other sleepily.

“You’re very quiet.” Sirius whispered. “Everything ok?”

“Yeah.” Remus whispered back. “Just thinking. Prank stuff.”

“Good.”

“...Sirius?”

“Remus.”

“You know Valentine’s Day?”

“Heard of it.”

“Did you want to... er. What Mary said...”

“I *knew* that would get you wound up. I could practically see your brain start to overheat.”

“Piss off.” Remus kicked his shin. “I’m just *asking* .”

“Mary loved all that stuff - presents and flowers and cards and shit. I liked doing it for her, because it made her happy. You’d hate it, so I won’t.”

“It’s just so public,” Remus said.

“I know. Don’t worry about it.”

“Ok.”

“... ”

“... ”

“Remus.”

“What?”

“ *Stop worrying* !”

“Fine, fine, I believe you!”

“Anyway, it’s not even a real thing.” Sirius said, thoughtfully. “Valentine’s day. I looked it up.”

“It’s real to muggles, isn’t it?” Remus frowned. He couldn’t say he’d given it much thought.

“There was a bloke called Valentine, but there’s nothing especially romantic about it. *But* I did find out some other stuff, about the Romans.”

“Why can’t you apply this thirst for knowledge to your actual schoolwork?!”

“Ugh, don’t be so boring. Anyway, have you heard of the Lupercalia?”

Remus felt a sinking feeling in his stomach and let go of Sirius’s hand.

“I don’t want to talk about wolf stuff right now.”

“You have heard of it!” Sirius sounded pleased.

“No. I just know the latin for wolf because it’s my bloody name.”

“Oh right... It’s not what you think, it’s a festival!”

“Ok.”

“And it’s really cool, there are blood sacrifices, and running around naked, and--”

“I’m going to sleep.”

“But you *like* history.”

“Shut up, Padfoot, he wants to go to sleep.” James shouted from across the room. “And so do I!”

“Yeah!” Peter echoed.

“Mind your own business.” Sirius shouted back.

“*Sonoro Quiesces* .” Remus muttered, creating a dry bubble of silence inside the bed. He still whispered when he spoke, though, because it was weird to talk an normal volume in the dark. “I said I didn’t want to talk about wolf stuff, *god* .”

“I was only trying to make you feel better about Valentine’s Day.”

“I didn’t feel badly about it in the first place!”

“Ok, sorry, I misread you.” Sirius was whispering too, but loudly, obviously annoyed. “You were all quiet about it and I wanted to cheer you up. I thought you were jealous of Lily and James.”

“Jealous?!”

“That’s the wrong word. You were just... I saw you watching them, kissing and stuff, and being all mushy. And I *know* you hate public displays of affection, but I dunno. It’s not like we have a choice either way...”

Remus blinked in the dark, rolling back over to see Sirius’s face.

“It bothers *you* , doesn’t it?” It had to, because it had never bothered Remus before. Suddenly he realised what it had all been about.

“A bit, maybe.” Sirius replied, honestly. Remus fumbled under the duvet for his hand again.

* * *

Tuesday 14th February 1978

The next morning, James and Sirius were nowhere to be found - Remus presumed they had left early for quidditch practice; it was a bright, sunny day, despite a chill in the air. After a few minutes of deep thought, Remus rifled in his bedside drawer for his very last chocolate frog and bugged it in his pocket before heading downstairs.

The rest of the Gryffindors awoke to find that in the night the house elves had decorated their common room with garlands of red and pink paper hearts - something which seemed to divide all of the students.

“It’s hardly appropriate in a *school* .” Christopher grumbled, meeting Remus and Mary on their way out of the portrait hole.

“Aww, I think it’s lovely.” Mary sighed, cheerily. She was subtly dressed for the occasion, wearing a red ribbon in her hair, and red enamel studs in each earlobe. Christopher shook his head, grimly at

her.

“If it were a proper holiday, like Christmas, or Easter or something--”

“But why *do* wizards celebrate those things?” Remus cut in, thoughtfully, as they progressed towards the dining hall. Every corridor was also decked out in pink and red crepe paper, and there seemed to be music coming from somewhere, “None of the purebloods I’ve met are Christians, or even know anything about Jesus, or the Easter bunny, or--”

“The Easter *what* ?!” Christopher was staring at him as if he was mad.

“Don’t bother, Remus,” Mary laughed, “Lily and I tried back in first year. We’re not supposed to ask.”

Christopher’s mood did not improve as they entered the Great Hall, which was bathed in a rosey pink glow by a collection of candles floating inside red glass lanterns. Fresh flowers had been placed in vases on every table, and pink envelopes flew back and forth over the heads of the students - valentine’s cards looking for their recipient.

“For goodness’ sake.” Christopher muttered, taking his seat and pouring himself a very black coffee.

“It’s only one day.” Remus said, lifting the teapot, which was also pink.

No sooner had they sat down, than a pile of pink envelopes fluttered into Mary’s lap, making her squeal with delight. Remus grinned too. He pulled out his own envelopes and whispered an incantation, tossing them into the air so that they mingled with the others flying above them.

“Here you go, Chris,” Remus tossed one across the table, “It’s not a valentine, promise.”

“Oh. Er... what is it?” Christopher held the blank envelope warily.

“An invitation.” Remus winked. “Give it your name, but don’t share it, ok?”

“Er... ok...”

“Good morning!” Lily appeared, looking cheerful as usual, clutching a book on advanced potions. “Anyone seen Potter?”

“Quidditch pitch?” Remus raised his head.

“Nope,” Lily shrugged, “I thought so too, but Ravenclaw booked it this morning.”

“He and Padfoot were gone when I woke up.” Remus said.

“That’s exactly what I was afraid of...” Lily replied, taking her seat.

No sooner than she had sugared her porridge, than a loud *pop* echoed over their heads, and everyone looked up. Those students who hadn’t immediately dived for cover beneath their breakfast tables began ‘oohing’ and ‘ahhing’, as a rather spectacular fireworks display began over their heads. The bursts of colour took the form of gigantic glittering love hearts, and the embers which rained down turned out to be pink and white flowerheads,

“Lilies!” Mary said gleefully, as one settled on her pile of cards.

“Oh no!” Christopher wailed, “I’m allergic!” He sneezed, before aiming his wand upwards and

gasping, “*Protego* !” to defend himself against the fluttering blooms.

“I don’t believe this…” Lily was blushing harder than Remus had ever seen her. He grinned,

“You were asking for it, I’m afraid.”

“I’d have been happy with a card!” She hissed, as the final fireworks died out, and the last of the lilies sailed to the floor like great pink snowflakes, filling the room with their lovely scent.

“Oh shut up, Evans,” Mary tutted, “It’s bloody gorgeous of him.”

“Cheers, MacDonald,” James appeared at Lily’s shoulder, with Sirius.

“You utter idiot!” Lily stood up and wound her arms around James’s neck, kissing him. Remus wasn’t watching this display, though; he was watching Sirius, who flicked his wand behind James’s back.

The flowers which had gathered on the table (those which Chris had not tried to clear, anyway) began to move again, and gathered together in front of Lily’s plate. With another soft little *pop*, the pile had transformed into a large box, emblazoned with even more lilies.

“What’s that?” Lily turned, leaning over to get a closer look.

“Open it and see!” James was grinning ear to ear, clearly utterly chuffed with himself.

Christopher sneezed again, and blew his nose, but was roundly ignored as Mary and Remus stood up to get a better look. Lily, still pink and smiling, carefully lifted the lid of the box, and everyone leaned in. On a red velvet pillow, with a bow around its neck, was a tiny little charcoal grey kitten with huge yellow eyes.

“Ohhh!” Lily gasped, reaching in immediately to pick up the mewling creature and cuddle it close, “Really, Potter?! You got me a cat?! I love him! Or… her?”

“Him,” James nodded, “I know your old family one died last Christmas, and Hagrid told me a litter was born in the village last week, so…”

“Oh he’s so sweet!” Mary reached over to stroke the kitten’s head.

“Oh for Merlin’s sake…” Christopher stood up, clutching his handkerchief to his nose. “I’m allergic to cats, too! Bloody stupid day…” with that, he got up and stormed away, further up the table.

“Such a shame.” Sirius smirked, taking his empty seat. “Morning, Moony.”

“Morning, Padfoot.” Remus smiled.

The rest of breakfast was spent cooing over Lily’s new kitten, and trying to choose a name. Remus kept a polite distance; just in case. He’d had bad experiences with cats in the past, and didn’t fancy any new scratches today, no matter how tiny its claws were.

Soon, everyone was getting up to go to their various lessons (while arguing over who ought to look after the kitten that morning), and Sirius fell into step with Remus,

“Walk you to history?” He offered,

“Oh, I don’t need to go,” Remus replied, slyly, “It’s a drop-in lesson, for NEWTs.”

“But you *always* go to your lessons,” Sirius replied, “Even the optional ones.”

“I know, but *you’re* always telling me to relax, so...” Remus covertly pulled his little matchbox out of his robe pocket and tapped it. Sirius raised an eyebrow,

“As much as I really love stoned Moony - what’s brought on the rebelliousness?”

“Does there have to be a reason?” Remus shrugged. He glanced around quickly to check that no one was listening too intently - but they were all pretty absorbed in their various cards and gifts. He slipped the chocolate frog into Sirius’s pocket. “Happy Valentine’s Day, wanker.”

He had never seen Sirius Black blush like that.

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'I Love You, You Big Dummy' by The Buzzcocks (originally written by Captain Beefheart & His magic Band).

Seventh Year: The Marauder's Inter-house Prank Planning Co-operative

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wednesday 15th February 1978

"I can't believe you're holding this thing here." Christopher said, agitatedly, as Remus unlocked the Charms classroom.

"Best way to avoid detection. Flitwick always lets me use it." Remus replied.

"Exactly! It's so brazen!" Christopher chided, as they entered.

"Brazen is our middle name!" James declared excitedly, following them.

"Your middle name is Fleamont, you prat." Sirius scoffed. "And this place is *genius*, no one will ever suspect anything. I knew your swot lessons would come in useful one day, Moony."

"A lot of people find Remus's study group very helpful, *actually* ." Christopher said primly, folding his arms and leaning against the wall.

"Oh Chris, he's just teasing," Remus chuckled, setting his book bag down. He glanced at his pocket watch. "We're all nice and early, James, have you got an agenda?"

"A what?" James turned around from the blackboard, where he was directing the chalk to draw a gigantic lion with ' *Gryffindor Rulez OK* ' beneath it.

"Never mind." Remus sighed.

"So who else got an invitation?" Christopher asked, over the top of his book (which seemed to have materialised from nowhere - Christopher was the only other person Remus knew who could go from 0 to reading in less than three seconds flat).

"About twenty or thirty people, maybe." Remus said, "Anyone who expressed an interest before Christmas who seemed trustworthy."

"It was an extremely rigorous vetting process, actually," James said, now standing on Flitwick's desk and trying to touch the ceiling with his fingertips.

"Yeah, we almost didn't let Wormtail in." Sirius barked with laughter from the window, where he was leaning half out of it, smoking. Remus dearly wanted to go over there and wrap his arms around Sirius, steal the cigarette (which was probably one of his anyway, the thief) and kiss his neck. But the others would be arriving soon, and it was a completely mental line of thinking, that.

"Why do you all call Peter that?" Christopher asked.

"Just a nickname." They all said, in unison.

Peter arrived shortly after that, followed in by Mary, Lily and Yasmin. Next were the sixth and seventh years from Remus's study group, and Dorcas - who was still on friendly terms with Peter, apparently. Mary's latest squeeze, a Ravenclaw boy called Jonty Simmons, who looked like he couldn't believe his luck. And finally, much to Remus's distaste, Emmeline Vance sauntered in (two minutes late) with Roman Rotherhide.

The room was pretty crowded after that, and noisy with the buzz of excitement. Most of the group had some idea why they were there, but others were curious, and all of them were fascinated by the marauders.

Sirius and James adored the attention, of course, and immediately took centre stage.

“Now, we all know why we’re here,” James started, using his quidditch captain voice.

Immediately, Emmeline Vance’s arm shot up.

“Sorry, but *I* don’t...”

Remus gave an impatient snort and Christopher, sitting next to him, shot him a strange look.

“Nor do I!” Dorcas raised her hand too, along with one or two sixth years from Remus’s study group.

“Why did all of you come, then?!” Sirius asked, eyebrows raised. A group of girls sitting at the back of the room giggled. Remus made a mental note. He’d tried to avoid inviting too many members of the Sirius Black fanclub, but it was pretty unavoidable when that applied to half the school.

“We’re here to plan a... an organised protest,” Christopher said, blushing a bit, because he wasn’t used to speaking in front of lots of people. “Against Slytherin.”

“Yeah!” Another sixth year shouted, “I heard you lot were planning your biggest prank yet!”

“*I* heard one of you knows how to get to the monster out of the chamber of secrets!”

“I heard you were planning to blow up the dungeons!” One Hufflepuff boy squeaked.

“Woah woah woah,” James held up his hands, “Bit less dramatic than that...”

“Well, if it’s about getting the Slytherins back for all the nonsense they’ve pulled, I’m in.” Emmeline said, decisively, tossing her luxuriant blonde curls. Remus tutted, loudly, and Chris shot him another look.

“That’s exactly what it’s about. And exactly why we need all of you to keep quiet about it.” James said, getting into his flow, now. “This is our last year, and we’re inviting all of you to help us plan our final prank.”

“Does that make us marauders?” The Hufflepuff boy squeaked again. There was an excited murmur.

“*No* .” Peter said, indignantly, though no one really paid him any attention.

“I like to think of it as more of a collaboration.” James said, thoughtfully.

“An inter-house co-operative!” Sirius added.

Everyone seemed pretty please with that. At least, it sounded impressive, and official enough.

“Right.” James clapped his hands together and rubbed them, smiling round at everyone. “Now that’s out of the way, who’s got some ideas?!”

Twenty hands shot up.

“Err,” Lily spoke up, “I think before we get into that it might be good to have some ground rules?”

“Like what?” Sirius folded his arms, grumpily.

“Like not actually *hurting* anyone? This is just fun, ok? Not revenge for everything Slytherin’s ever done.” She was using her Head Girl voice, now, and a few people lowered their hands.

“Fair enough,” James said, holding up his hands amicably, coming between Sirius and Lily. “No physical harm intended. And as I said before, no talking about it outside of this room. On pain of death. *Joking*, Evans!” He ducked as she went to slap the back of his head.

After these initial teething problems, everyone seemed to enter into the spirit of the thing. Lots of people had ideas - from the extreme (Lily vetoed summoning a banshee to haunt the dungeons), to the subtle (Emmeline knew of a spell which would transfigure everyone’s right shoe into a left shoe - she said she’d done it to her sister over the summer and it had taken her three days to realise what had been bothering her).

Eventually, time ran short, so James set everyone ‘homework’ - requiring them to come back next week with an idea.

“Then we can decide on the best one.” Sirius declared.

“Who decides?” Mary narrowed her eyes.

“Me, James, Pete and Moony, obviously.” Sirius raised his chin.

“Can’t we vote?” One of the sixth years asked.

“Yeah, that seems fairer.” Mary nodded. “If we’re all putting ourselves at risk of expulsion for you.”

“Expulsion?!” Christopher bit his lip, “Surely not... surely we won’t go that far...?”

“*Will* we get in trouble, though?” The hufflepuff boy raised his hand again. Everyone looked at him.

“Not much.” Sirius shrugged. “Bit of detention never hurt anyone.”

“No, sorry, I don’t mean detention.” The boy shook his head, nervously. “I mean with... you know the Slytherins. They won’t... tell the death eaters to get us, will they?”

Sirius looked about to laugh, when he realised that the atmosphere in the room had changed. A few people looked very awkward, some of them were whispering amongst themselves. Remus could even smell a whiff of real fear creeping into the room; everybody seemed to have tensed up a bit.

Of course, Sirius and James did not worry about that sort of thing. This was all part of the crusade of chaos they’d been on since they were eleven. Even Remus had been pretty flippant about the magnitude of the prank. But he saw now that it meant a lot more to those gathered in the room. James, Sirius and Peter were the only purebloods in attendance. Unless you counted Christopher, who had his own axe to grind with the Slytherins.

James stood up again, pushing off Flitwick’s desk and drawing himself to full height.

“Absolutely not. No one in this room is getting hurt because of this prank.”

A few people relaxed - after all, James Potter, heir to the Sleek-ezy fortune, head boy, quidditch

captain and leading mischief maker was somebody that most people trusted. Remus believed him whole-heartedly - even if the issue had not been raised, it would have been a point of honour for James to protect anyone smaller than him. Lily was beaming at him too, and Sirius looked very pleased, as if that had settled everything.

“Right,” Lily clapped her hands together now, taking the floor again, “See you all again next week, I suppose. I think we’d all better leave in small groups, don’t want to draw attention to ourselves...”

With that, the room slowly returned to normal, groups of students now chattering excitedly about ideas they’d had, or curses they’d like to try out. Lily assumed her Head Girl voice and started directing people out of the room in groups of three or four, at short intervals. The marauders turned inwards, to confer.

“Bloody hell.” James muttered, so that he wouldn’t be overheard, “That was intense.”

“What did you expect?” Mary tutted, hoisting herself up onto the desk and swinging her legs. “This isn’t a game to everyone - some people are out for revenge.”

“Then that’s what we’ll give them.” Sirius said, fiercely. He had that brightness in his eyes that told Remus he would be utterly unbearable for the next few hours. A plan was afoot, and nothing could bring Sirius down from that kind of excitement.

“Calm down, Black,” Mary teased, “You’re schoolkids, not generals.”

“For now.” He replied, darkly.

“Ok you lot,” Lily turned back into the room. It was only the seven of them left. “We’ll go back in two groups, because *no one* is going to believe you four weren’t up to something...”

Mary, James, Lily and Peter left first, with instructions for Remus, Sirius and Christopher to give them a ten minute head start. Remus was a bit reluctant about this, but there was no way to bring it up. He couldn’t help remembering what had happened the last time he and Christopher were alone in that classroom with Sirius. Though, of course, Christopher hadn’t known Sirius was there at the time, and nor would Remus ever tell him.

They tidied up the desks, cleared the chalkboard of James’s lion, then stood about awkwardly for a little bit.

“Let’s play truth or dare.” Sirius grinned.

“Why?” Remus sighed, leaning on the desk. *Here we go...*

“Pass the time.”

“Or we could just have a normal conversation...”

“Christopher wants to, don’t you, Christopher?”

“Err...”

“Great, you can go first. Truth or dare, what do you fancy?”

“Um.” Chris’s eyes flicked between Remus and Sirius nervously. “I don’t... um... truth?”

“Excellent! Start off easy, if it’s your first time playing,” Sirius nodded encouragingly. “Hmmm, let

me see... ah! Ok, why did you want to get involved with the prank?"

"What?"

"Y'know. How come you came today?"

"Chris has been involved since the beginning, Padfoot, you know that." Remus tutted.

"Right, right - so what made you get involved in the first place, then?"

"If you have to know." Christopher said, rather icily, "It was your brother."

Sirius, to his credit, did not flinch.

"Fair enough, he's a right little prick." He nodded. He licked his lips, and glanced at Remus, then back at Chris. "Sure there was no other reason?"

"No."

"I'll go next," Remus said, quickly. "Chris, you can ask me to do a dare." He never picked 'truth', it was far too dangerous.

"Umm..." Christopher bit his lip, still a bit thrown by this whole thing. "Oh, I don't know, I'm crap at this sort of thing."

"I've got a good one!" Sirius said at once. He winked at Remus, then leaned over and whispered in Chris's ear. Christopher's eyes widened and he laughed, covering his mouth.

"Ok, Remus," Chris was still blushing, but he was having fun now. "Ok, you have to write something rude on the blackboard and leave it there."

"I gave you specifics." Sirius complained.

"I'm not saying that out loud!" Christopher laughed, turning even redder. Remus could easily guess the tone of Sirius's suggestion. He raised an eyebrow wryly, as if under duress,

"Ok, fine, I'll do it..."

He went up to the board and picked up some chalk. He considered it for a moment, "How rude?" He asked the other two, casually.

"Very." Christopher said, smirking shyly.

"Well, it's the rules of the game, I s'pose..." Remus began to draw, enjoying the snickering over his shoulder as he deftly traced out the first rude thing that popped into his head.

He stepped back, an artist admiring his work. The other two boys stood either side of him, grinning madly. "Well?" He asked.

Sirius slapped him on the back,

"Moony, me old pal, it's the biggest knob I've ever seen."

"Well, that's a relief." Remus smirked, forgetting Christopher was there. He didn't seem to notice - or else just assumed that it was marauder humour (which it sort of was).

“Glorious.” The younger boy nodded, still very pink about the cheeks.

“Come on then,” Remus set down the chalk, “That’s enough of a gap, we can go now. Common room?”

“Oi, I’ve not had my turn, yet!” Sirius folded his arms.

“What’s the point,” Remus shook his head, “You always choose a dare, and there’s nothing I can think of that you’d even think twice about doing.”

“Are you saying I’m the *bravest* --”

“Stupidest, maybe,” Remus teased, elbowing him in the ribs. “Come on, let’s go.”

They left the classroom and set off through the quiet hallways back to Gryffindor tower. It was fairly late in the evening now, and curfew was only a couple of hours off, so they were alone most of the way, other than the portraits, who were enjoying the peace and quiet.

“Did you finish *Maurice* , Remus?” Chris asked. Always back to books.

“Nearly,” Remus replied. “Just a chapter or two to go. Do you promise me it’s a happy ending?”

“Definitely,” Chris nodded. “You’ll love it. I was thinking... if you’re free on Saturday we could have a chat about it in the Three Broomsticks? I’d really like to know what you think.”

“Yeah, maybe...” Remus was torn between his desire not to disappoint Christopher (which he always seemed to be doing) and his keen awareness of Sirius’s very mercurial mood. “Don’t see why not.”

“Is that the muggle book you’ve been reading?” Sirius asked, “Is it good then?”

“Yeah, quite good.” Remus nodded, cautiously.

“Great. Maybe I’ll read it then. I can get it done by Saturday, I read faster than you.”

“You do *not* !” Remus scowled, scandalised.

“Well I have more time to read, anyway.”

“Only because you hardly go to half your lessons.” Remus shot back.

“I doubt it’s your sort of thing, Sirius.” Christopher spoke up. They both looked at him. He shrugged, “Well, it’s not! Tell him what it’s about, Remus.”

“Er...”

But it was too late, Sirius was already rummaging in the book bag at Remus’s hip as they walked, and at once withdrew the text. Remus fought the urge to snatch it back, only because he’d underlined some parts of it, just because he’d liked them so much, and he was embarrassed about it now.

(I think you’re beautiful, the only beautiful person I’ve ever seen. I love your voice and everything to do with you, down to your clothes or the room you are sitting in. I adore you.)

Fortunately, Sirius didn’t flip through the pages, only looked at the back cover, frowning slightly.

“Isn’t this one of my uncle’s?” He asked.

“Yeah, you said I could borrow it...” Remus rubbed the back of his head.

“Is it dirty?”

“No.”

“Oh well. I’ll read it anyway.” Sirius poked out his tongue. “That can be my dare.”

“Very brave.” Remus grabbed back the book and shoved it in his bag.

“But it’s about...” Christopher frowned. They were almost at the portrait hole now, and Sirius stopped, making all three of them stop too. Sirius looked at Remus, raising an eyebrow, he nodded to Chris.

“He makes a lot of assumptions, this one.”

Remus was surprised to find that his own cheeks were heating up, too. He shrugged,

“He doesn’t know you very well.”

“Oi, Christopher?” Sirius shot him a very wicked look. “Dare me to snog Moony?”

“Wha-- I--?!” Christopher looked stricken, as if he knew there was a joke somewhere, but he couldn’t figure out the punchline.

Sirius wasted no time. He took Remus’s head, roughly, and pulled him in for a kiss. Remus gave in. It was a bit mean, but he could hardly refuse. If it was a test of loyalty, or simply something Sirius thought would be funny, he had to go along with it.

“Oh for merlin’s sake!” A voice came from further up the corridor, causing Sirius and Remus to spring apart. “I’m away for a week and the castle turns into an orgy!”

All three boys spun around to see Marlene standing there in her travelling cloak, duffle bag at her side. She gave them a knowing smirk, “What a load of queers.”

Chapter End Notes

Maurice is by E.M. Forster and I thoroughly recommend it.

Seventh Year: Mind Games

Chapter Summary

Remus has some really negative internal thoughts in this chapter, which might be hard to read if you're having a bad day. Look after yourself and don't read it if it makes you sad!

Everyone was thrilled to see Marlene, of course. Sirius ushered her through the fat lady portrait as fast as he could, and practically trumpeted her arrival to the whole common room, as though he had conjured her from thin air.

Lily and James rushed over, hugging her and taking her bag, and cloak and leading her to the couch by the fireplace, where Mary hugged her so fiercely Marlene almost squeaked.

"We've missed you!" Mary exclaimed, finally letting her friend go.

"I can see that!" Marlene gasped, pink cheeked. "Have you all been that bored without me?"

Remus hung back a little. He and Marlene didn't hug much, anyway, so he didn't think it would be noticed. He watched her warily, and chose to sit in the armchair furthest away from her, trying not to draw attention to himself. Christopher had slipped away too, at some point, maybe up to his dorm room. In the back of his mind, Remus hoped Chris wasn't angry with him, but he filed that away for another time. He had too much to worry about with Marlene's return.

"How's Danny?" Mary was asking now, lowering her voice.

"He's... recovering." Marlene nodded, her eyes serious. "He's at home now, mum's driving him crazy as usual. He won't... he won't be going back to the Cannons." She swallowed and looked down at her hands.

"It's a bloody disgrace." James banged his fist on the arm of the couch, "If I was their manager, I'd--"

"He's too badly injured, anyway." Marlene shook her head, wiping quickly under her eyes, "He'd have been off for the rest of the season either way; it'll be months before he's back on a broom. So. Just as well."

"Still bollocks." James muttered.

"Yeah, well." Marlene looked up, stonily. "Can hardly blame them. I know *I* would have... anyway. Not worth thinking about."

Remus felt sick with tension. Everyone else sitting in the group knew what he was - everyone *except* Marlene. The guilt he had been successfully avoiding for a week came crashing back over him like a cold shower. It had been *his* responsibility to warn everyone of the attack. He had told Dumbledore, but it hadn't been enough; he'd failed. And now the evidence of his failure was sitting right in front of him, her face thin and her eyes dark with worry.

Marlene cleared her throat and flashed them all a brave smile,

“I’m going to talk to Madam Pomfrey as soon as I can; see if she recommends anything. The healers at St Mungo’s were useless, more concerned with keeping him quarantined than actually *helping* him. Hardly anyone could answer the questions I had about transformations, or aftercare, or pain relief... it was like they’d rather I just stopped talking about him; like they wanted to pretend he wasn’t there...”

Her voice was getting higher and thinner as she said this, tears threatening to choke her. She cleared her throat again. “I mean, I *know* what he is, don’t get me wrong. I know what he’s going to become. But he’s still my brother for fuck’s sake!”

“Of course he is.” Mary said, squeezing Marlene’s hand. She gave Remus a look, and he looked at his feet. *No. No way. Absolutely not.*

No one else was speaking, but they all had the same look on their faces. *Are they thinking about me?* Remus wondered, queasily, *do they blame me? Are they wondering what I’m capable of?*

“Anyway.” Marlene shook her head again. “What’s been going on here? Is that your cat, Lily?”

“Valentine’s day present,” Lily smiled, stroking the purring bundle in her lap. “His name’s Hieronymus.”

“Catchy.” Marlene sniffed, smiling. “Nice one, Potter, you big softie.”

“You’re still on the team, right?” James asked, leaning forward, “My star beater?!”

“Obviously,” She rolled her eyes, “I’m assuming the training times haven’t changed...?”

“First thing tomorrow morning.” James grinned.

“And, we’re planning this huge--” Peter started, eagerly, but was cut off,

“Oi, McKinnon.”

They all turned around to see Yasmin standing behind the couch, hands on her hips and grinning widely. She’d obviously been getting ready for bed, her hair was piled messily up on her head and she was wearing in her oversized Holyhead Harpies shirt and a baggy pair of men’s winceyette pyjama bottoms.

“Alright, Patel?” Marlene answered. Remus couldn’t see her face but he knew she was smiling. She twisted round on the couch and got up on her knees, and the girls hugged tightly.

You could do that, Remus realised, if you were girls. No one thought it was weird. He wondered if Sirius was thinking the same thing. He hoped not.

That pretty much put an end to any more werewolf talk, which was a relief. Remus just hoped he could avoid it later, when it was just him and Sirius. He was sure to want to know how Remus *felt*, and what his *thoughts* were... and while yes, ok, Remus did understand that communication was important and blah blah blah... did that mean they had to discuss every painful thing in minute detail?!

For god’s sake. He was already getting agitated about it, and it hadn’t even happened. He cracked his neck and then his shoulders, willing himself to loosen up. He was still a bit wound up from that kiss out in the corridor, he realised. He wasn’t sure whether or not Sirius had meant it that way, or if it was all just a show for Christopher, but it had stirred something in Remus, and now it felt like... unfinished business. He shifted a bit in his seat, and tried to ignore that, too.

Mary had tactfully moved to the other end of the couch, and was now casually filing her nails and chatting to Lily, who was teasing Hieronymus with a quill.

Yaz climbed over the back of the sofa to take her place, and she and Marlene had their heads together, speaking very quickly and very quietly. Remus caught the muggy scent of the *muffliato* spell, which was odder from the outside than the inside - as if their very words were blurred out somehow. They were sitting so close to each other that their thighs touched, Yaz's arm slung around the back of the couch just behind Marlene's head, in a way that would have raised eyebrows, even if only *one* of them was a boy.

James and Sirius were in a deep conversation about the upcoming quidditch match against Ravenclaw, Peter eagerly interjecting every now and then with his own tactical insights. Remus pulled his book out and tried to read. It was no good; he couldn't concentrate with so many people chatting.

The last postcard from Grant was tucked into the dust jacket of *Maurice*, and he read it again. This time the photo on the front was of three bikini clad girls frolicking in the sea. Even Sirius had found that one funny. There wasn't much on the back - Grant was a man of few words, when it came to written correspondence.

Working hard, having fun. Hope you're well.

Love.

That word again. Obviously Grant could say it. Or write it. He couldn't spell Remus's surname the same way twice, but *love* was no big deal. Ugh. Only half an hour ago, Remus had been almost completely free from worry; cocooned by his friends, and Sirius, and the idiotic notion that everything would be ok, if they could just come up with a really good prank.

But the shade had fallen now, and no matter where he looked, all Remus could see was trouble and his own failings. Frustrated, he slammed his book closed on the postcard, a little too hard. Everyone looked up.

"All right there, Moony?" Lily asked, gently.

"Fine. Sorry." Remus nodded. He reached into his pockets for a cigarette, pulling out his matchbox quickly.

"Not in the common room, please!" Lily switched to head girl mode as quick as a flash.

"Right, right, sorry..." He clumsily clambered to his feet, fag pursed between his lips. "I'll go upstairs."

"We're going to bed too." Marlene said, then blushed and stammered quickly, "I mean, upstairs. To sleep. Erm. You know - if we've got an early practice..."

Yaz was barely able to keep a straight face as she waved goodbye to them all, before hurrying up the stairs after her girlfriend. Mary and Remus shared a knowing look, but James and Lily still seemed blissfully ignorant.

"Night." Remus nodded to everyone, heaving his bag onto his shoulder and heading up the opposite flight of stairs to the boys dormitories.

It was a mistake. Alone, he had nothing to distract him from his own judgements - and they were harsh. Quite right too, in Remus's opinion. If the McKinnon family could not forget the

repercussions of his failure to act, then why should he have any respite? And those were just the people he *knew* he had let down - there were families up and down the country now facing a full moon for the first time. It was a good thing his father was dead, and his mother had washed her hands of him. At least he couldn't cause them any more pain.

He sat on the window ledge, letting the cold air wash over him, smoking and thinking and scolding himself until he thought he may as well just fling himself out of it. But that was just a passing fancy. Remus was too much of a coward to do what ought to be done; this much he knew.

Still, he felt a strong urge to do something. Something drastic, something violent. The wolf inside would have liked a good long run, but it would be past curfew soon. There was a bit of dope in his sock drawer, but that would only make him more gloomy. Someone was hiding a bottle of firewhisky; he could smell it, but that was probably in preparation for his own upcoming birthday, and he couldn't spoil that for his friends. Maybe put a record on and flail around a bit, but he'd never been much for dancing, and his hip was bothering him.

Sirius's footfall on the stairs disrupted his thoughts. Remus licked his lips, remembering that kiss from earlier. Ah. There was always that. The ultimate distraction.

Decision made, he stubbed out the cigarette and got up, striding purposefully across the room. He reached the door just as Sirius pushed it open - best not to even give him a chance.

"Wotcher, Moony, just came to see if yo--"

He shut him up with a fierce kiss, crushing their lips together, pulling him at the hips so that they were pressed hard against each other.

"Oh, ok..." Sirius gasped, when he finally wrenched himself free. He kicked the door shut behind himself as Remus dragged him to the bed.

It was good. Really, really good. Remus's frustrated urgency was met with answering eagerness from Sirius, and they tore against each other, out of sync in the best possible way. Losing yourself in drink or drugs was nothing compared to losing yourself in Sirius Black. They'd been at this long enough now to know the edges of each others limits, and just how far they could push them.

"Fuck." Sirius groaned, when it was all over, and the windows were steamy and the waxing moon had risen outside. Remus reached for his fags once more, still buzzing, his hot skin humming.

"Fuck." Sirius said again, on his back, staring up. Beautiful mess. "What brought that on?"

"Just you." Remus replied, exhaling smoke. "Just wanted it."

"Not complaining."

Remus settled back, smoking quietly. This was good. This was better, anyway, than anything else he could be doing. He was still restless, though. A bit more tired, but fidgety and unsettled. He could go again. He could go all night, if it would shut his brain up. That made him glance at the door - they hadn't shut the curtains, and by some miracle got away with it.

"Where are the others?"

"Mm?" Sirius's eyes had drifted shut, but he stirred awake, valiantly, "Oh, er... Pete's three rounds into a chess game with a second year who's obviously some sort of evil mastermind, Mary went to bed, and Prongs and the missus have gone to the prefect's bathrooms. They thought they were being subtle." He chuckled lightly under his breath.

"I'm going to brush my teeth." Remus said, getting up. In the bathroom, everything came flooding back, and he couldn't meet his own eyes in the mirror.

When he came back out, Sirius had woken up a bit, and was sitting up on bed. He smiled at Remus.

"Hey, I just wanted to check you were ok about Marlene and everything,"

"Fine," Remus nodded, casually, climbing back in, drawing the curtains closed as he did. "It's good to have her back."

"Mm, I hope you're not worried about--"

"Do we have to talk about that?" Remus crawled towards him, straddling his lap. He began kissing Sirius's neck, rocking into him slowly.

"Blimey, again?" Sirius sounded surprised, but not exactly unhappy about it.

"Mmm..." Remus replied, taking his wrists and holding them, tight. Such lovely, lovely wrists.

"Mmm... well ok, but if you are worried--"

"Shut up, Black." Remus growled, pulling back and meeting his eye. Sirius did, biting his lip. Remus smiled. "Much better. No more talking tonight."

* * *

It was a cruel trick, really, exploiting Sirius's peculiar proclivity for following direct instructions. But it worked, and Remus got his peace, at least that night. The next day was tougher, but lessons and library time became a comfortable barrier between them once again, not to mention the general rabble of friends who accompanied them pretty much everywhere.

A wiser, braver man might have used the time to look into himself, to address the feelings of guilt and shame and self-disgust, and maybe make some changes for the better.

Remus preferred pretending everything was fine.

And for a little while anyway, it seemed that Sirius was going to let him. They were still together almost all of the time, and it wasn't as if they were arguing. If Sirius wondered why Remus's libido rocketed any time they started to have a private conversation, he didn't say anything. In the end, he took a different tact.

The weekend before the upcoming full moon, they were walking back up to school from Hogsmeade, and Remus had had to slow down because of his stupid hip, yet again. Sirius and James were chatting ahead, but Christopher hung back to keep Remus company.

They had been to the Three Broomsticks, but the whole big group of them, and Christopher was always too shy to talk much in that sort of situation. So he was taking his chances now.

"I'm glad you liked the book," he said, hands in his pockets as he walked, "Wasn't it a nice ending?"

"Yeah, great." Remus puffed, rubbing his hip to try and get it going.

"Maurice - the character - reminded me a bit of you."

"What? Nah." He was starting to sweat with exertion, despite the cold February air. He wiped his

forehead, squinting uphill. Sirius and James were striding ahead, laughing about something together. Christopher followed his eyeline. He pressed his lips together.

“Are you and he... ?” He couldn’t find the words, and Remus knew what that was like, so he just gave a straight answer. No need to be coy.

“Yeah. We are.”

“Oh.” Christopher sounded deflated, as if he had still thought it was all a joke at his expense.

“What’s that like, then?”

“I dunno. Good. Great.”

“I wish...” he sounded so sad, and he never finished the sentence. After a long time, and more struggling to keep up, Remus touched his shoulder gently.

“There’s someone for everyone, Chris.”

“Maybe.”

“Oi Moony! Come on!” Sirius was yelling. They were almost at school now, Sirius had stopped under the stone arch gateway to wait.

“See you later, ok Remus?” Christopher muttered, hurrying off at a funny little jog. Remus ploughed on, finally reaching the school gate. His hip was screaming at him now, the joints burning, pain shooting up and down his leg. He nodded at Sirius by way of greeting, too out of breath to speak. He leaned against the stone with one arm, hoping Sirius wouldn’t mind waiting a bit longer while he pulled himself together.

“Sorry.” He panted, finally. “Hate that fucking hill.”

“Are you ok?” Sirius asked, giving him a funny look. “Sorry, didn’t mean to leave you behind.”

“Fine.” Remus replied, “You know me, just a bit wonky.” He straightened up, winced, and rubbed his side again.

“Is it your hip?” Sirius had his hands on *his* hips now, and was giving him an up and down sort of look that was rather like Madam Pomfrey after a bad full moon.

“Yeah,” Remus shrugged. “s’always been a bit funny.”

“When you say ‘a bit funny’, do you mean that you’re in pain?”

“S’just *sore*. ” Remus said, indignant.

“So, pain then.” Sirius raised an eyebrow. Remus hated that superior look. “How long has it been hurting?”

“Oh, I dunno,” Remus threw his hands up, exasperated - what was the point of this?! “Since I was thirteen.”

“Are you joking?!”

“Just off and on.”

“What does Madam Pomfrey say?”

“Oh for god’s sake, I don’t whinge to her about this sort of crap!” Remus was aware that his voice was getting louder, a few third years walking past turned and looked at him, before running away giggling.

“You’re being ridiculous.” Sirius folded his arms and tossed his hair, “She’s a nurse, she’s supposed to make you feel better. What would you do if I told you I’d been in pain for five years?!”

“It’s not the same!”

“What are you *on* about??”

“*You’re* not a fucking werew---” He stopped himself just in time. They both looked around themselves furtively, checking no one was listening in. Remus scolded himself. It had been a very long time since he’d let anyone get the better of his temper.

Sirius leaned forward, glaring at him.

“You don’t deserve to suffer, for fuck’s sake.” He muttered.

That hurt. He didn’t know why, but it struck Remus so sharply it knocked the breath out of him, and his eyes pricked. He straightened up, careful to remain expressionless this time. He jutted his chin out at Sirius, meeting his glare.

“I’m not talking about this any more. Come on, we’ll miss dinner.” And began to stride ahead, biting back against the stabbing in his side.

Seventh Year: Remus the Martyr

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I was born with a plastic spoon in my mouth

The north side of my town faced east, and the east was facing south

And now you dare to look me in the eye

Those crocodile tears are what you cry

It's a genuine problem, you won't try

To work it out at all you just pass it by, pass it by

Substitute me for him

Substitute my coke for gin

Substitute you for my mum

At least I'll get my washing done.

Wednesday 22nd February 1978

The stalemate between Remus and Sirius lasted for the rest of the weekend. Sunday was the Gryffindor vs. Ravenclaw quidditch game, so they got away with not speaking much. They both sat together in the stands, cheering when it was appropriate, and booing any time the Ravenclaw's scored.

“Aaaand that's another ten points to Gryffindor!” The commentator called out through the megaphone, “An overwhelming sixty points now scored by team captain James Potter, no surprises there - fans are starting to wonder what will become of the mighty lions next year when they don't have their golden boy to depend on--oof, mind that bludger, Simms! ... nicely done! Though I *must* say, I'd have veered left, but I suppose not everybody is chosen for their dexterity, sometimes it's just about giving everyone a chance, regardless of ability...”

“Who let Lockhart do the commentary?” Sirius grumbled. “Stupid prat doesn't even know anything about quidditch.”

“He told me he was lined up to play for Puddlemere,” Peter said, “And the only reason he never played for Ravenclaw was that his coach said he shouldn't squander his gift in school games.”

“You're so gullible, Pete,” Remus nudged him, “I know more about quidditch than that twat.”

“Yeah, and Moony knows about as much about quidditch as you know about judging character.” Sirius added, his voice unnecessarily sharp.

Remus coloured. Fine, if Sirius wanted to be passive aggressive.

“Well, Padfoot,” he replied, coolly, “If you want to do it so much, go and ask McGonagall. I think you’d be perfect for the job.”

“You-what?” Sirius gaped at him. Remus raised an eyebrow,

“Oh yeah, you’re the only person in this school who chats more shit than Lockhart does.”

Mary and Lily burst into giggles, covering their mouth. Sirius scowled.

“Up yours.” He muttered.

The game ended with 280 points to Gryffindor, but Sirius wasn't cheering.

Quidditch matches generally took up most of the day, from an early breakfast listening to James’s pep talks, to the inevitable after party in the common room. Sirius stayed up late, so nobody noticed that they didn’t go to bed together.

By Monday, they were on slightly more civil terms - or at least, neither of them wanted any of their friends to know they’d been fighting. Remus immersed himself in his NEWT revision - if he wasn’t alone in the library, he was extending his group study sessions to run an hour longer than usual, each night. It was the week of the full moon, and he was utterly exhausted, but at least it made getting to sleep easier.

And he had to avoid Marlene too, of course. He deliberately skipped going to Madam Pomfrey’s Tuesday night healing classes, just in case the subject of werewolves reared its ugly head again. Marlene was the sort of girl who would derail an entire lesson if she thought injustice was being done somewhere.

To Remus’s surprise, Gilderoy Lockhart, the smarmy Ravenclaw commentator, made a guest appearance in his Wednesday revision group. Lockhart was in the year below, and hadn’t crossed the marauder’s radar much so far. He was a bit camp and annoying, prone to laughing too loudly in the dining hall, but that was all Remus knew about him.

He sidled up to Remus, his hair in ridiculous blond bouffant curls. He stank of aftershave, too.

“Love this idea,” he gushed, “Helping other students to achieve, really great!”

“Er, yeah, I s’pose.” Remus replied, shuffling his papers.

“Thought I’d lend a hand,” Lockhart grinned toothily, “I’m rather a whizz myself, you know. Charms, Transfiguration, Potions - you name it.”

“Um. Great. Cheers.” Remus nodded, “I said I’d go through anti-Giant legislation with the third years today, but have a chat with Chris,” He moved away, quickly, leaving Christopher to deal with it.

Wednesday was also the second official meeting of the prank-planning group, so Remus and Chris stayed back in the Charms room after study group. Chris had a vaguely dazed expression as they leaned against Flitwick’s desk, waiting.

“Sorry about that,” Remus offered, lighting up a cigarette as Lockhart swanned out. “I dunno how to deal with him.”

“Oh, it’s fine, he’s in half my classes, so I’m used to it.” Chris replied, still looking a bit disturbed.

“What did he want?”

“It took a while to figure out,” Christopher frowned, “He kept telling me how good he is at everything... but I think he wanted help with Charms.”

Remus snorted disdainfully.

The prank planning session was shorter than the week before - it turned out that no one had had any decent ideas yet. The fourth year Ravenclaws had uncovered some frankly terrifying curses which they were all eager to share, but Lily stepped in, reiterating the rule that nobody ought to get hurt.

They split up again for the journey back to their common rooms, and Remus was faced with a choice between Marlene and Yaz or Sirius and Mary. In the end, he decided it was better the devil he knew, and chose Sirius and Mary. She did most of the talking, which was a relief, and the only awkward moment came when the boys were all back in the dormitory.

Remus went over to his own bed, pulling back the duvet.

“You’re sleeping there, then?” Sirius asked, out of the blue. Remus frowned, turning to look at him. He hadn’t thought it was up for debate - they were barely speaking to each other, why on earth would they sleep together? And *why on earth* did Sirius want to call attention to it in front of the others?!

“Yeah.” He nodded, turning back, “Full moon tomorrow. Thought we should all get as much sleep as possible.”

“Yeah, fair enough.” Sirius replied. Remus climbed in and drew his curtains shut, without another word.

“Everything ok?” James whispered, very loudly. Sirius grunted a response, and that was that.

* * *

Thursday 23rd February 1978

Remus was more on edge than usual on the day of the full moon. He’d slept badly anyway, thinking about the McKinnons and Sirius and wondering how he was ever going to fix any of it.

At breakfast, it looked as though Marlene had had a difficult night too. Her eyes were rimmed red, and her hair was messier than usual. Yaz and Mary sat either side of her, vying to be the one who comforted her the most.

“I just can’t stop thinking about him,” Marlene shook her head, staring into her bowl of cornflakes. “I’ve read so many books and accounts, and they all say it hurts a lot...”

Remus stopped eating his own breakfast, and sipped his tea instead, trying to hide his distress.

“I’ve read that too,” Sirius said, “But I’m sure that as long as Danny asks for the help he needs he’ll be fine.”

Remus tried to ignore this, seething quietly under his collar.

“Mum’s had to take him to the ministry.” Marlene continued, miserable, “They have cells there,

apparently. We asked if there would be healers present, but no one can tell me *anything*.”

“I’m sure it’s the best place,” Yaz squeezed her arm, gently.

Nobody agreed with her. Mary pursed her lips.

“He doesn’t deserve this!” Marlene burst into tears, “He doesn’t deserve to be locked up alone! He’s my lovely brother, not some... some *animal*.”

The nausea of guilt threatened to overwhelm Remus, and he left as soon as he could. The rest of the day he could barely concentrate on his lessons. Perverse as it was, ever since the marauders had become animagi, he’d sort of looked forward to full moons at Hogwarts. It had been a while since he’d dreaded one quite so much as this.

When he arrived at Madam Pomfrey’s office in the evening, he found her frowning her way through a pile of letters. He’d never seen her doing paperwork before.

“Oh, hello dear,” she smiled at him, tiredly, “Shall we get going?”

He nodded, and waited patiently for her to put on her cloak. She saw him staring at the letters. “They’re from ex-pupils, mostly,” she explained, “Ones who were affected by the attacks. Some of them have family members facing their first full moon, and what to know if I know anything helpful.”

“Oh.”

“I’ve been able to pass on a bit about aftercare, but you and I know how little real information there is,” she continued, as they walked out. Remus remained mute. “I’ve had poor Miss McKinnon here every day, almost. She’s a friend of yours, isn’t she?”

“Yes.” Remus’s voice cracked slightly. Madam Pomfrey patted his arm, softly.

“It must be very hard for you, my dear.”

“It’s fine.”

“You know you can always talk to me, if you need to.”

“Thanks.” He could hear Sirius’s voice in the back of his head, taunting him, *I told you so...*

But Sirius was wrong. Physical pain was the very least of Remus’s problems, and something he was willing to bear, if he had to. It reminded him what he owed.

Despite his apprehension, the full moon was a relief. Remus didn’t even cry out from the pain of transformation, he just let it consume him. As ashamed as it made him, it was good to become something else for a few hours; to relinquish control. The wolf was still on good terms with Padfoot, at least, and they could play and run and hunt without any messy human problems getting in the way.

But it wasn’t to last.

* * *

Friday 24th February 1978

The routine was standard by now. Remus transformed back, the others checked he was ok, then

left, Madam Pomfrey came to collect him, he spent the morning under a sleeping draught, woke up in time for lunch, then headed back to his own bed in the afternoon.

More recently, Sirius had been coming to collect him from the infirmary, if his timetable allowed for it. (And, actually, even when his timetable didn't allow for it - Sirius took any excuse to bunk off.) Of course, given the way Remus had been acting, he didn't expect Sirius to come that day.

But Sirius was always full of surprises.

"Brought you a frog," he said, waiting patiently as Remus finished tying his laces. He handed over a chocolate frog box, which Remus accepted. His temper had cooled quite a bit; perhaps a good long sleep had been all he needed.

"Thanks."

"Can we be ok, again?" Sirius asked, sounding genuinely sorry. "Can we both just admit we said some stupid stuff, but it's over, now?"

Remus looked at him for a long time, letting him stew a little bit. Then he smiled,

"Yeah, go on then."

They walked back to the tower quite happily, though Remus was pushing himself a bit harder than normal, trying not to limp or show any trace of discomfort.

"Is Marlene ok?" Remus asked, as they neared the common room.

"Yeah, think so," Sirius nodded, "She got a letter from her mum this morning, saying Danny's ok. Cried a bit, but she's less of a state now."

"Good. That's good."

They pushed through the portrait hole and walked through the common room.

"I think I'll go straight to bed for a bit," Remus said, making for the dorm. "If that's ok?"

"Of course!" Sirius nodded, over polite, as they headed up yet another flight of stairs. Remus was seriously struggling now, but he'd be damned if he'd let Sirius see it.

"You tired?" Remus asked.

"Nah," Sirius said, "Slept all morning. Peter too."

"Oh good." Remus finally reached his bed and sat down. Without even thinking, his hand went to rub his hip. He stopped as soon as he realised, but Sirius's eyes zeroed in on it at once. He looked Remus in the eye reproachfully.

"Did you speak to Madam Pomfrey?"

"We had a lovely chat, thanks." Remus stiffened, defences back up, "About all her poor ex-students who had to transform for the first time last night. It was really cheery."

Sirius tutted.

"But did you talk to her about your hip?!"

“No.” Remus huffed, lying down.

“Remus, stop being difficult! You see her every week! Just *mention* to her-- I mean, *I’ll* do it, if you want me to.”

“Jesus Christ, not this again! Leave me alone!” Remus sat up again.

“No!” Sirius retorted, just as viciously, “I don’t understand why you won’t tell her about it, I’m sure she could help.”

“Oh my god, why can’t you just drop it? I said I don’t want to bother her with crap like this. You’re making such a big fuss over nothing!” Remus was on his feet now, the wolf inside him wanting the higher ground; asserting dominance.

“And *you’re* avoiding your problems again!” Sirius raged, “You always do this and it’s so bloody exhausting! You think you’re being so mature, do you? Keeping everything bottled up. It’s stupid! You’re just making a martyr of yourself, it’s like you *want* to be miserable.”

“Oh, get fucked, Black!” Remus shouted back. “Easy for you to have a go, isn’t it?! Why do we always have to talk about *my* shit life, hm?! Mr ‘tell me a fucking secret’?! ”

Sirius blinked, shocked, and Remus was elated; he had something now. He had Sirius in his jaws, he wasn’t letting go until he tasted blood. “What about *you* , Sirius?! How come we never get to talk about *your* fucked up family, with your death eater brother and your insane cousin?! Why don’t we talk about *your* pain, and *your* scars for a little while, see how that feels.”

“Remus, for fuck’s sake--”

“No, I know! Why don’t we talk about your *mother* ?” Remus went in for the kill, and it was more effective than even he had expected. Sirius changed completely; his expression froze, his posture tensed, as if he’d been punched in the gut.

Remus almost wished he had punched him, because then at least Sirius could just punch him back, and they could have a fair fight, and that would be it. But that hadn’t been fair, and he couldn’t take it back.

Sirius gave him a look of utter hurt and shock, before turning quickly to anger.

“Go fuck yourself, Lupin.” He spat, storming out.

“Yeah, piss off, then!” Remus shouted as the door slammed.

He was breathing hard, and his face was very hot. He wished Sirius would come back and shout at him a bit more, so he could shout back, but he settled for chain smoking and The Sex Pistols. Fuck everybody.

Sirius did not return, and Remus didn’t know where the map was, so he couldn’t look for him.

Eventually, the dorm room door did open again, and Lily and James came in, very close together and whispering happily,

“Oh, hiya Moony!” James stopped as he caught sight of Remus brooding by the window. He looked a bit sheepish, “Sorry, we thought you’d be in the hospital wing, still.”

“No. She lets me go after lunch, normally.” Remus replied, monotone. He got up, “I’ll get out of

your way.”

“No, no, Remus, don’t!” Lily said, flustered, “We just came up here for the quiet.”

“Really?” Remus raised a sarcastic eyebrow, and Lily and James blushed, looking away.

“Where’s Padfoot?” James went over to sit on his bed.

“Don’t know.”

“What?”

“Don’t know. Don’t care.” Remus withdrew another cigarette from his matchbox and lit it with the end of the last one.

“Are you... having a fight?”

“Look, stay out of it, Potter.” Remus snarled.

James recoiled, and looked at Lily, who shrugged back at him.

At that very moment, as if it had been summoned just to break the tension, an owl flew in the open window, surprising all three of them. It was from the Potters, and James retrieved two letters tied to its leg. He glanced down at one and held it out to Remus.

“For you, Moony.”

Clicking his tongue irritably, Remus got up off the sill and went to snatch it from James’s outstretched hand. He opened it, skimming the brief note from Mrs Potter, who had been so kindly forwarding all of his correspondence.

He expected another postcard from Grant, but it was a neatly folded envelope. He didn’t recognise the tidy, blue ink handwriting, but it had a muggle stamp.

He looked down at the return address, written in tiny script on the back.

If undelivered, please return to :

Ms Hope Jenkins, Sparrow Ward, Cardiff City Hospital, Cardiff.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Substitute' by The Who.

Seventh Year: Hope

Chapter Summary

This is quite a sad chapter, and deals with family things as well as illness. Read with care and always be kind to yourself first.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.

They may not mean to, but they do.

They fill you with the faults they had

And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn

By fools in old-style hats and coats,

Who half the time were soppy-stern

And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.

It deepens like a coastal shelf.

Get out as early as you can,

And don't have any kids yourself.

Ms Hope Jenkins.

Remus choked on his fag, then dropped it, burning a hole in his trousers. Yelping with pain, he leapt up, patting wildly at the hot patch on his thigh.

"Remus!" Lily stared at him, alarmed, "Are you ok?!"

"Yeah, yeah..." He picked up the cigarette and tossed it out of the window. He'd scrunched up the

little envelope in his other hand. He stuffed the crumpled paper into his pocket. “Just... nipping to the loo.”

He hurried into the little bathroom and slammed the door shut, trying to regulate his breathing a bit. Ok. Ok. He ought to have expected this. He was the one who’d written to *her*, after all.

Remus pulled the letter out of his pocket and smoothed it out. He couldn’t have opened it in front of Lily and James; it might say anything, and he was so unprepared. He bit his lip. He wanted another cigarette, badly, but he’d just chucked the last one out of the window. Typical.

He peeled open the envelope slowly, taking care not to tear it, as if that might mean something. The paper was tissue-thin, and he unfolded it gently. The handwriting was more recognisable now. He knew it from the original letter, written all those years ago, except now it was more spindly; noticeably crooked, as though the hand had been shaking.

Dear Remus,

I am sorry it has taken me so long to reply to you. I am afraid I have been unwell, and I have not been at home to receive post.

I was so happy to hear from you. I am sorry I cannot write more, my darling, but I would love to hear how you are getting on. Please write again, to the address below.

Love Mum.

Remus’s own hands were shaking now. ‘*Love Mum.*’ What the fuck did that mean?!

He felt rage creeping up on him, ready to swallow him whole. The spat with Sirius faded into insignificance; now he was truly furious. It was an anger that had lain dormant for a long time now, but it had always been there, in the core of him. An anger that had no direction, no purpose other than filling him up with red hot mania. Maybe Greyback had put it there. Maybe Hope’s abandonment had. Right now he didn’t give a shit.

Unable to control himself, he kicked the bathroom door. He kicked it so hard that he splintered the wood, cracking it right through.

“Fuck.” He muttered. “Ow.” He hoped he hadn’t broken a toe.

“Oh my god, Remus?!” Lily’s voice sang out again.

“Sorry.” He said, almost on instinct, as he wrenched his foot free from the door. He unlocked it.

James was standing right there, his eyes big and wide, Lily just behind him, as if he was shielding her from Remus.

“What the bloody hell are you playing at?!” James said, his voice hard. “Look, if you’re having a tiff with Padfoot then sort it out between you, don’t start tearing our room apart!”

“Sorry.” Remus said again, feeling quite small. He’d never been told off by James before; it was scarier than he’d expected.

“Remus?” Lily pushed her boyfriend aside, impatiently, “What’s wrong?”

He shook his head, looking down at the letter in his hands. His shoulders slumped. He was still breathing too hard to be able to speak. He handed it to her.

Lily gave him a quizzical look, but took the paper from him. As she read it, her eyes grew bigger and her mouth dropped open. James read it over her shoulder, and soon enough their expressions matched. Remus couldn't seem to get his breathing under control; he wasn't quite sure what was happening. His chest grew very tight, as if all the air had been sucked out of the room. He suddenly felt very hot and very dizzy, and he was seeing stars.

He stumbled, clutching the door frame for dear life.

"Remus?!" Lily's voice came to him in an echo, as if he was at the bottom of a deep well. Her soft hands were on his shoulders, and she guided him down towards the floor - which was a good thing, because his legs had just decided to give up. She started rubbing his back slowly, and was speaking very calmly, "Deep breaths, Remus, do you hear me? In through your mouth, then out through your nose, ok? With me; one... two... three..."

He didn't know what sort of magic that was, but it started to work, and after ten deep breaths he began to feel normal again. His vision clearing, he looked up. Lily was sitting beside him on the dusty bedroom floor. James was standing over them, looking worried. He had the letter.

"Thanks," Remus said, still short of breath, "Sorry, I dunno what happened there."

"My sister has funny turns like that all the time, when she gets anxious," Lily explained. "Got anything sweet? She normally has a biscuit after the worst has passed."

"Um... yeah." Remus delved into his pocket for the chocolate frog Sirius had given him earlier. He unwrapped it and bit the head off, quickly. His mouth filled with rich sweetness, and he really did feel much better.

He tried to get up, and James immediately offered a steady arm to help,

"Sorry I had a go, Moony," he said, still sounding very worried, "I was a right dick."

"No, I shouldn't have broken the door..." Remus replied, carefully brushing his trousers down and walking to his bed to sit.

"Oh, that's nothing," Lily got up and withdrew her wand, "*Reparo* . See?"

"Can I have the letter back?" Remus asked, weakly.

"Yeah, sorry!" James hurried to pass it back. Remus read it again. His stomach tightened, but he didn't get dizzy again. *Love Mum* . "I didn't know you'd sent her a letter." James said. "I didn't know you even knew where she was."

"Your parents helped me." Remus said, still re-reading. "I only told Sirius about it."

"Oh, love," Lily came to sit by him, she squeezed his hand. "Are you going to write back?"

Remus looked up, staring ahead. He made a decision.

"No. I'm going to see her."

"Oh!" Lily squeaked, "Yes, of course... er... I bet McGonagall would help you arrange it for the weekend, maybe--"

“No.” Remus shook his head, “I’m going right now.”

“What?!” James said.

“I’ve waited long enough.” Remus said. “I’ve got the address. I’m going.”

“Remus, don’t you want to just have a think--” Lily started.

“No.” Remus said, pulling his hand away from her.

His hand brushed against the cigarette burn in his leg. Bugger. Where was he going to get another pair? Better try a mending spell once he’d calmed down a bit. He got up and went to his trunk to find a clean pair of trousers. Couldn’t meet his mother with cigarette burns on his clothes, could he?

“No thinking.” He said to Lily. “She’s in a hospital, god knows why, but I might not have long.”

He undressed without even thinking. Lily looked away, quickly, blushing, but he didn’t care.

“Prongs,” he said, “Can I have your cloak?”

“Of course.” James nodded, without hesitation.

“Thanks. I’m going to try and apparate from Honeyduke’s, I think. Shouldn’t be gone all night, I can be back before curfew, I bet.”

“Good plan.” James nodded.

“How are you going to get to Honeyduke’s?!” Lily asked, looking very confused. Remus looked at James, curiously. The other boy gave a sheepish chuckle and pushed his glasses up his nose.

“Er... there's sort of a secret passageway...”

Less than half an hour later, they had passed the hunchbacked witch statue and were about to begin the journey to Hogsmeade. They’d hurriedly dressed in muggle clothes, something Lily had suggested almost at the very last minute. James had wanted to tell Sirius and Peter, but Remus refused. Peter couldn’t apparate anyway, and Remus didn’t have room for Sirius in his head right now. Luckily, James respected this reasoning.

“How many *more* secrets do you lot have?!” Lily was whispering, staring at her as they progressed along the dark tunnel.

“Does she know about the map?” Remus asked, innocently.

“What map?! Potter! What map?!”

They weren’t really fighting. It was just part of the fun, for Lily and James, all the bickering. They’d spent so many years doing it already they just didn’t know how to stop. Remus liked it. It kept his mind off everything else.

Because he’d calmed down now, and the rational thoughts were starting to creep back in. *Where are you going? Why would you think she wants to see you, after all these years? You’ll get caught out of bounds and expelled, and you’ll drag Lily and James down with you .*

And Sirius. He wanted more than anything to have Sirius nearby, if only they weren’t fighting. Perhaps he’d brought this all on himself, invoking Sirius’s mother like that. Oh god, what if Hope was like Walpurga?!

But he pressed on, because he'd come this far now. Soon enough they were in the cellar of Honeyduke's and all memorising the hospital address, preparing to apparate.

That part was easy. Remus was so full of emotions and adrenaline that he barely had to turn his head and he was whooshing through space, following the current of magic towards Cardiff. Lily and James landed moments later, holding hands.

"This is Wales, then," Lily said, looking around at the quiet city street they found themselves on. "Never been before."

"Me neither." James and Remus replied in unison.

"Let's look for the hospital, then," she smiled. She dropped James's hand and took Remus's instead, half leading him to the end of the road.

They'd overshot by only a street or two. The main building was ornate, old and red brick, the rest of it '60s grey concrete. It had that cold institutional atmosphere which reminded Remus too much of St Edmund's.

"Right!" Lily said, brightly, facing a large map of the building, beneath a signpost pointing in various directions. "It was Sparrow ward, wasn't it... so that's... over there."

She set off again, and Remus was so, so glad she was there, because everything in him was telling him to run away and never look back. Sparrow was in one of the concrete blocks. They stopped just outside.

"Um... Lily? James?" Remus said, holding them back. "Do you mind... not coming with me? I just... I want to do it by myself. Sorry."

"Of course." Lily said, patting his shoulder. "We'll wait right here, right James?"

"Ok." James nodded, carefully, "Moony, are you sure you don't want me to get--"

"He won't come." Remus said, with absolute certainty. "You were right, we did have a fight. I was awful to him, I said some really shitty stuff. He's angry and he's got a right to be."

"Yeah, but still--"

"It's fine, Prongs." Remus assured him, "I'm fine. Ok, I'm going in now."

"Good luck!" Lily smiled. He nodded, grimly, and approached the revolving doors.

Inside the hospital there were signs pointing in all sorts of directions, and three times Remus had to go back on himself because he'd taken a wrong turn, or got in the wrong lift somewhere. It was an awful place; it stank of sickness and piss and disinfectant masking blood and death. Remus's nerve was weakening by the minute.

Finally, he passed through a set of double doors with 'Sparrow' printed neatly above in blue and white. It led to a quieter corridor, with a nurses station at the end and lots of light open rooms with neat rows of people lying in beds.

Remus shuffled along to the nurses station, trying to get a look at the names of the patients listed on the wall behind.

"Who're you looking for, lovie?" A plump nurse asked him with a pleasant smile.

“Um. Hope Jenkins...” Remus mumbled.

“Ah! Relative, are you?”

“Yes. I’m her son.”

“Oh, she’ll be so pleased! She talks about her kids all the time, does Hope. Just follow me, pet.”

He didn’t have time to be stunned by this latest revelation that his mother had ‘kids’, plural. Speechless, Remus followed the nurse down the squeaky green lino corridor, onto a ward with six or eight beds in it. She led him to the far window, where light poured in. “Hope, my love, you’ve got a visitor! Your boy’s come up to see you, isn’t that nice?”

The nurse ushered him in, and he stood at the end of the bed, helplessly. The woman lying in the bed looked as though she had been dozing, though she was propped up in a half-sitting position. She was blinking now, disoriented, and frowned slightly at the nurse.

“Who?” She spoke in a quiet, hoarse voice, still confused until her dark eyes landed on Remus. Her pale eyebrows shot up. “Oh.” She said.

“Hello.” He waved, feeling stupid.

“I’ll give you two some privacy,” the nurse was saying now, drawing the pale hospital curtains around the bed, “Can I get anyone a cup of tea?”

“No thank you.” They both replied, still staring at each other.

She was very small, and very frail. Skeletal, even; her bones and tendons showing through the skin. She looked much older than Remus had imagined; but perhaps that was just the illness. Her face was sunken, and had a morbid, skull-like quality. He remembered how lovely she’d looked in her photograph, and how pretty she might still be, if she was well.

More alert now, her watery black eyes stared up at him, with an almost greedy glint; as if she was absorbing every inch of his gangly frame. He stood still, and let her.

“Oh,” she whispered, hoarsely. Her eyes filled with tears. “Oh, you look just like him.”

So this was his mother. He looked down at her and felt nothing at all.

He cleared his throat,

“I got your letter.” He didn’t know what else to say. He wished he hadn’t come at all.

“You didn’t have to come.” She replied, softly. “I didn’t dare ask you to. But I did want to see you. I’ve wanted to see you... for years.” She closed her eyes and the tears ran tracks down her thin face.

He bit his tongue. All sorts of foul, nasty things boiled in his throat, wanting to be spoken. But what use was it? She was clearly dying, he could smell it on her. Angry words would make no difference. She spoke again. “You’re at Hogwarts?”

“Yeah,” he nodded. “Final year.”

“He’d be so pleased. Lyall. Your father.”

Silence again. Remus didn’t want to look at her for too long. She looked so sad, so very weak and

sick. "Is there anything you want to ask me?"

Remus shrugged. This was more horrible than he could have imagined. She laughed, softly,

"You won't hurt my feelings, you know. This might be your only chance."

She swallowed, when he still did not speak. "All right then, I'll just tell you. I'm sorry for what I did. I'm not proud. I loved your father more than... well, I loved him with all of my heart. He was everything to me, I wish you could have known him. When you were hurt, and he died... I just didn't know what to do. I was so young, I was alone. I hadn't seen my own family in years, and I didn't even know the neighbours because Lyall said we had to keep things secret."

She was Welsh, he recognised the accent now. The way she spoke his father's name in two gentle syllables - *Ly-all*. He felt stupid for not realising, seeing as they were in Cardiff, but still. No one had ever told him she was Welsh. He supposed it wasn't pertinent information to anyone but him.

"Look," he said, "It's fine, you don't have to explain."

"I've thought about you," she said, desperately, "Every day. My boy, my poor little boy."

"Don't." He said, feeling uncomfortable - frightened, even. "It's ok, please don't..."

He sat down in the stiff backed hospital chair beside her. He didn't reach for her, or hold her hand, that felt like too much.

"I thought it was the best thing," she wept, the tears tickling down into the pillow she lay on, "I couldn't have looked after you, you were so strong, even when you were that small. I had to lock you up, you were so frightened and you were crying for me and I couldn't go in..."

He felt as if a heavy block of ice had settled in the pit of his stomach. He just wanted her to stop talking, he didn't want to hear this,

"You did the right thing." He said, "You did. You did everything you could, I never blamed you."

That was true. He'd blamed his father over and over again in his head, hated him fiercely for years. But he had somehow felt more sympathy for his mother, a muggle who was left just as much at sea by Lyall's death as he was.

"Does it still... happen?" She asked, her eyes big. They were the same greeny brown as his own. He nodded,

"It's not as bad," he lied, "I have help. It's safer."

She looked relieved, which made him happy.

"And school? I bet you're as clever as your dad!"

"I like school," he said, "I do pretty well." He wasn't sure what else to say about it, "I er... I have his wand. Lyall's."

She smiled, paper white thin stretching over her hollow face, like a skull.

"And do you... have someone? In your life, looking after you?"

"I..." He thought Lily and James, and Peter and Grant, and Madam Pomfrey, and Mary and Marlene, and even Professor McGonagall. And Sirius. "Yeah, I do. I have friends."

He glanced at the record player on her bedside table, and the little pile of records on the chair. The Beatles, Cliff Richard, The Kinks. “Are these yours?” He asked, genuinely curious for the first time.

“Oh yes,” she nodded, “Love a bit of a dance, I do. Lyall was the reader, but I’m happiest with a nice pop song. He used to tease me.”

Her accent was lovely, a sweet, friendly up and down. He was glad she wasn’t posh; he hoped he didn’t sound too common for her.

“I like music too.” He said, softly. He couldn’t bring himself to raise his voice, but she didn’t mind. “David Bowie, mostly.”

“You must take after me,” she said, sleepily, still smiling. “My bouncy little boy. I used to set you down on the rug while I did the housework, and play my records and you’d jump around on your bottom and wriggle like you were dancing. *Love Me Do* was playing on the radio when you took your first steps.”

She’d grown tearful, saying all this, her eyes had welled up.

“I think I remember,” he said, quickly – it was a lie, but it would make her happy. He didn’t want her to be this sad, not for his sake. Without thinking, he reached out and took her hand, gently, as if she might shatter. It was a very little hand – she was a very little woman. “I love the Beatles,” he said, “Always have.”

She beamed. Even through the hollow cheeks and dark eyes of her illness, she had a lovely smile. Hope squeezed her son’s hand and smiled up at him, and they were comfortable like that for quite some time. Remus felt the stirring of something towards her – something warm and old and familiar.

Eventually he offered to put some music on for her.

“Oh, the player’s broken.” She replied.

“Really? Let me see...” Remus fumbled in his pocket for his wand, and gave the black wooden box a tap. He did it without letting go of her hand, and she made a small sound of delight and pride, seeing him use magic.

The record began to turn, and the sound which came out was clear and lovely. It was a Fairport Convention record; Remus had never bothered with them much before; too hippie for him. But she smiled as Sandy Denny’s larksong voice began to fill the room. So he listened.

Across the evening sky, all the birds are leaving

But how can they know it's time for them to go?

Before the winter fire, I will still be dreaming.

I have no thought of time.

For who knows where the time goes?

Who knows where the time goes?

They both sat listening quietly to the music, and Remus saw that he got some of his shyness from her, maybe. She never held eye contact too long, and never pushed him into talking. Remus had a sense that they could sit in contented silence like that for hours, and understand each other just as well as if they'd done nothing but talk.

In a little while, the nurse came back. It was already after visiting hours, she said, and Matron would be on her case. Remus didn't want to go, and Hope didn't want him to leave.

"Will you come back?" She pleaded, turning weepy again.

"I will." He promised. "As soon as I can, I will."

She pulled his hand to her lips. She was very weak, but he let her. She kissed his scarred knuckles.

"I love you, my darling."

Something inside him broke when he realised he couldn't say it back. He didn't know how to say it and mean it.

"I'll see you soon." He promised again, hoping she didn't mind too much.

He left the room in a daze, and it was a miracle he managed to get out of the hospital at all. It must have taken twice as long as it took him to get in.

Outside, it had grown dark. Lily was sitting on a bench, with a big black dog at her side. She stood up, the street light behind her illuminating her hair, seeming to set it alight; a halogen halo.

"Alright, Moony?" She asked, eyes serious.

He shrugged, speechless. Instantly, Lily stepped forward and wound her arms around his waist, laying her head against his chest and squeezing. He wrapped his arms around her, gratefully, and hugged her back, bowing his head to inhale the lovely apple skin smell of her. He was crying, and Sirius was right there, but he didn't care, he just let Lily keep squeezing him, feeling as if she was holding him together. He could hear Padfoot whining and panting. Finally, he broke away, rubbing his eyes.

"Sorry," he said, bashfully.

"Don't be stupid," she squeezed his arm, her own sea green eyes shimmering. "Want to go home?"

"Actually," Remus sniffed, "I want to get really, really pissed."

Padfoot barked.

Chapter End Notes

The poem is 'This Is The Verse' by Philip Larkin.

The song is 'Who knows where the time goes' by Sandy Denny.

Seventh Year: Drunkards

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Better get yourself together darling

Join the human race

How in the world you gonna see

Laughing at fools like me

Who on earth d'you think you are

A superstar?

Well, right you are

Well we all shine on

Like the moon and the stars and the sun

Well we all shine on

Ev'ryone come on

“Right. Pub, then?” Lily said, business-like once more. “I think we’d better go back to Hogsmeade, don’t you? I don’t fancy our chances apparating back to Scotland drunk...”

“Yeah, good plan,” Remus nodded, wiping his nose on his sleeve, still sniffing. “...where’s James?”

“Well we realised that it was going to look really suspicious if both the head boy and the head girl were missing,” Lily laughed. “So he went back to cover for us. He um... he sent Sirius. We both thought...”

“It’s ok.” Remus nodded. He finally turned to address the dog, sitting patiently by. “Sirius?”

He transformed back at once, and stood there looking awkward, rubbing one arm with the other.

“Hello, Moony.” He said, softly.

“Hi.” Remus nodded back, suddenly very shy.

“Oh, Remus, I forgot!” Lily broke the atmosphere. She handed him a small square cardboard box. A carton of Silk Cut. “James’s idea,” she shrugged.

“Life saver, thanks!” Remus accepted them gratefully.

“I’d better go and get in touch with him, actually,” Lily continued, glancing between the two boys,

“Black, give me the mirror? I’ll go and let him know where to meet us.”

Sirius handed her the compact, and she smiled at them both, before walking a little ways away - so that she was just out of earshot.

Remus sat down on the bench, opening the box of fags with his teeth, then pulling one out. He held it up to Sirius,

“Light it for me? I’m so nervy it’ll probably blow up in my face.”

Sirius clicked his fingers, and the cylinder lit. Remus sucked on it appreciatively. Sirius sat next to him.

“Moony I’m--”

“Sirius--”

They both tried to speak at once, then smiled at each other timidly.

“Sirius.” Remus said, “I’m sorry. I was a twat.”

“You were.” Sirius nodded, taking a cigarette of his own. “But you weren’t completely wrong.”

“Nor were you.” Remus sighed. “I dunno what’s wrong with me.”

“There’s *nothing* wrong with you, Remus.” Sirius touched his knee, gently, looking him in the eye. He was in muggle clothes, which was a nice change, Remus thought. Black jeans and his black leather jacket. Remus smiled.

“You look really good.”

“So what else is new.” Sirius stuck out his tongue. He turned solemn again, “I couldn’t believe it when Prongs told me about the letter. I felt like shit for shouting at you, I just wanted to make sure you were ok, then he said you’d gone...”

“Sorry,” Remus replied. “I just had to get here straight away, I didn’t even think.”

“I wouldn’t have, either.” Sirius admitted. “Though, actually, I dunno if I would exactly rush to my mother’s bedside.”

Remus snorted, half-heartedly, and they were both quiet for a bit, thinking about their mothers.

“What’s she like?” Sirius asked, finally.

Remus considered this carefully before answering. He tried to recall her voice, her eyes, the way her hand felt in his.

“She’s nice.” He said. “I think I like her.”

“All right, you two, ready?” Lily returned, obviously having judged them suitably made up.

“Yeah,” they both replied, smiling.

* * *

They ended up in the Three Broomsticks, all five of them - James had brought Peter down from the

castle with him. Three fire whiskies in and Remus was feeling pleasantly warm and loose, grinning dopily as his friends made a racket for his benefit.

No one asked him any questions, which was perfect; they just drank, and laughed and talked like real teenagers for once.

“This map is some of the best magic I’ve ever seen.” Lily marvelled, after studying it for some time. “And you *only* use it for pranks?!”

“What else would we use it for?” Sirius raised an eyebrow.

“You’ve even got the moving staircases!” Lily exclaimed, clearly delighted.

“That was one of mine.” Remus said, eagerly.

“It was *all* yours,” Sirius said, “The whole thing was your idea, Mr Moony.”

“Yeah, but you lot did loads of work on it...”

“What are you going to do with it at the end of the year?” Lily asked.

The four boys looked at each other with a note of sadness. The map would no longer be useful to them, if they weren't at Hogwarts. Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs would no longer be Hogwarts' premiere mischief makers. James shrugged,

“Pass it on, I s’pose? Maybe to someone in the co-operative.”

Remus hated that idea, and finished his fourth drink.

“Rosmerta!” Sirius called out, raising a hand, “Another round, darling?”

“Right you are my love...” she called back.

“Flirt.” Remus nudged him under the table.

“I’m trying to get *you* drunk.” Sirius replied, piously, “As requested.”

“I’m already drunk,” Lily slurred, blinking hard. “I don’t know how I’m going to walk back to school...”

“I’ll carry you.” James said, valiantly, though he was clearly starting to get a bit wobbly himself.

“I don’t want it to be over.” Peter said, morosely.

“Calm down Wormy, we’re not going back yet.” Sirius said, as Rosmerta appeared with a tray of drinks. Remus grabbed another firewhisky and knocked it back. He liked the burn; it felt like it was working.

“I don’t mean tonight.” Peter said, clumsily slamming his chubby fist on the table, “I mean school, I mean *everything* .”

“School isn’t everything.” Lily patted him gently.

“No.” He sighed, “But it’s all going to change, isn’t it? We won’t see each other all the time, we’ll all have jobs.”

“Speak for yourself,” Sirius laughed, “Some of us are independently wealthy. Anyway, of course we’ll see each other every day, idiot, we’re all moving in together!”

Lily and James looked at each other, suddenly sober. Sirius's eyes narrowed, “What?”

“Mate,” James said, awkwardly, “Er. Lily and I have been talking about... maybe getting a flat together, after the summer.”

“Yeah,” Sirius nodded, “We’ll all move in, and--”

“Padfoot,” Remus touched his knee, “He means just the two of them.”

“What? *Why* ?!”

“Let’s not talk about this now!” Lily said, hurriedly, “Nothing’s decided!”

But everyone could see that it was.

“What about this prank, then?” James said, still eyeing Sirius, “What are we going to do if no one comes up with anything good?”

“We will,” Remus said, “There’s time. Is it me or is the mass-levitation idea starting to sound good?”

“Oh good, you *are* drunk.” Sirius smirked, “How the fuck are we supposed to levitate two hundred students? And *why* would we?”

“Be funny.” Remus shrugged, then giggled. Everything seemed like it would be funny, right then.

“There are enough of us,” James said, “If everyone concentrates, we could easily levitate them all.”

“And do what with them?! Practical jokes need a practical element!” Sirius insisted. Everyone else burst out laughing at him. He shook his head disdainfully and took a swig of his butterbeer.

“You’re not drinking?” Remus said, suddenly.

“Er... no.” Sirius looked down, self consciously. “Thought someone better stay responsible enough to get you lot back in one piece.”

“Ahhh,” Lily grinned dopily, “You *do* care, Black! You’re all soft and sensitive really, aren’t you?”

“I just don’t want anyone expelled before we can get this prank off the ground!”

“Off the ground! So you agree with the levitation idea!” James cackled.

“Oh for goodness’ sake...” Sirius rolled his eyes. “I’m going to the loo.” He got up and left them laughing.

Remus took the opportunity to pop out for a cigarette. He could have smoked in the pub, and thought that Lily and James might even let him get away with it, but he wanted a minute to himself. Outside was nice and cool, the air felt clean. He lit up and started puffing away, wrapping his arms around himself against the chill. He was really drunk. He had to lean against the wall just to stay up. It was nice; he didn’t have to worry about anything if he was drunk. No one would expect him to.

He leaned his head back against the wall, catching sight of the pale crescent moon glowing through the scudding clouds. He thought about Livia, as he often did when he saw the moon. And Castor. He thought about their warning, and how it had been so meaningless, in the end. Why was that? Remus's whisky addled mind hit on something - something he hadn't thought about before. But as soon as it was there, it was gone again. He shook his head, dazedly.

"All right?" Sirius came out and joined him.

"Mmm." Remus nodded, smiling widely.

"Pisshead." Sirius smirked.

"Oi!" Remus shot back, playfully, "I can hold my drink, ffffank you very much. Unlike *some*."

"Oh yeah?" Sirius humoured him, leaning against the wall too. He took Remus's hand, and laced their fingers together.

"Yeah," Remus nodded emphatically, "Remember my fifteenth? You and Pete got so wankered, you threw up in the tunnel."

"Godric, how could I forget," Sirius laughed. "Horrific."

"Nahh," Remus sighed, happily, squeezing Sirius's fingers. "It was nice. You fell asleep on my shoulder and told me I was magic."

"Did I?"

"You did."

"That does sound nice. I must have been very drunk." He laughed, "Not that I *don't* think you're magic, Moony."

Remus's mind had drifted, though. His cigarette had gone out, and he dropped it.

"Wish I could say stuff like that."

"Like what?" Sirius frowned.

"Nice stuff."

"You say lots of nice stuff, Moony."

Remus shook his head, frowning. It was no good.

"Need another drink."

"Ok, come on then..."

Inside, Peter was half asleep, propped up on his elbow, and Lily was sitting in James lap. She seemed to be trying to locate his tonsils with her tongue.

"Bloody hell." Sirius groaned, "Give it a rest, you two."

Remus sniggered, finishing the last of his whisky. That was better.

"You can talk!" Lily poked her pink tongue out at him. "Marlene told me she caught you two

snogging in the corridor the other night!”

“So what if she did?” Siris replied, primly, “It was private enough until she showed up.”

“Christopher was there,” Remus put in. Lily laughed and pointed at Sirius,

“Ha! Exhibitionist!”

“She’s right.” Remus nodded, drunkenly, “You are. Remember I caught you with Mary all the time when I was a prefect.”

“Oh well, that was *Mary* , you know what *Mary’s* like...”

“Remus!” Lily said, still giggling and quite pink in the face now, “You won’t believe what Mary told me about you last year!”

“What?”

“It was before you came out, so you’d think she’d admit it was made up by now, but she told me and Marlene that you and she... *you* know...”

“Made sweet heterosexual love?” Sirius supplied, barely stifling his own laughter now.

“Oh!” Remus said, “Yeah, that’s true, actually.”

“What?!” Lily stared at him, her mouth open.

“Ages ago...”

“Last year, actually.” Sirius corrected. “It’s fine, Lily, he only did it to make me jealous.”

“Arrogant prick.” Remus snorted.

Peter began to snore. James looked at him, then at his pocket watch,

“Reckon we’d better head back?”

* * *

Remus insisted on finishing not only his drink, but everyone else’s before they left. He wanted to be good and drunk, so that he would fall straight to sleep, without any of the intrusive thoughts that had been plaguing him since Marlene’s return. Plus, though he wasn’t going to tell Sirius, his hip didn’t hurt as much with all that liquor in his blood.

James was true to his word, and gave Lily a piggyback all the way to Honeyduke’s. Remus looked at Sirius with a quirked eyebrow. The other boy laughed,

“I’ll levitate you, if you want, but I am *not* carrying you.”

“Who says romance is dead,” Peter yawned, rubbing his eyes and trailing along beside them.

By the time they were descending the steps into the cellar of the sweet shop, Remus was feeling a lot less cheerful about the whole thing. Perhaps the last few whiskies had been a bad idea. His head was starting to throb painfully, and his vision was swimming. His limbs felt heavy, and as they sank into the darkness of the tunnel, he quite fancied just curling up to sleep right there.

“No one’ll miss us,” he mumbled as Sirius gently pulled him along, “S’a weekend tomorrow.”

“I really don’t think you’ll be happy waking up here, Moony,” Sirius chided gently. “Trust me.”

“I trust you.” Remus replied, his mouth thick with saliva.

It was all right for Peter. He’d transformed into a rat and curled up to sleep in Lily’s pocket.

“He’s so good at that,” Sirius marvelled, “I can’t transform drunk.”

“I can!” James said, excitedly, and promptly did, much to Lily’s fright.

“Jesus Christ.” she breathed, “I’m never going to get used to that.”

Prongs bowed his antlered head, and lowered one knee, allowing Lily to climb onto his back. She gripped his neck, grinning, and whooped as James set off clattering down the tunnel at a gallop.

Remus and Sirius stared after them as they vanished into the darkness.

“Charming.” Sirius huffed.

“Why aren’t you a more useful animal?” Remus grumbled, leaning heavily against him.

“It’s not like we got to *choose*...”

“Urrgh.” Remus groaned, “I’m going to be sick.”

“Ugh, over there, then...” Sirius grabbed him by the shoulders and turned him around just in time.

Luckily Remus hadn’t eaten much that day, but it still felt horrible. His gut contracted painfully and he retched until his eyes bulged and he thought he’d choke. His eyes were stinging with tears when he finally came up for air. He rubbed them away quickly. Sirius handed him a goblet of cold water.

“Where did you get that?” Remus spluttered, wiping his mouth.

“Keep it on me for the full moons,” Sirius shrugged, “Weightlessness charm. Must have left it in my pocket. Oi, just sip it, or you’ll chuck it all up again.”

Remus obeyed. He washed his mouth out and spat.

“Sorry.” He said, weakly, “That’s disgusting.”

“Call it payback for your fifteenth.” Sirius laughed, “Come on, shall we keep going?”

Remus nodded, a hand on Sirius’s shoulder to keep himself steady.

“Shouldn’a got so drunk.” He mumbled.

“You deserved it.” Sirius replied, blasé. “After the day you’ve had. Or the week you’ve had...”

“I was a prick.” Remus was getting melancholy now, feeling sorry for himself. Sirius wasn’t having any of it.

“Enough of that now, we’ve talked about it.”

“I *am* a prick though.”

“No. You’re lovely.” Sirius insisted.

“I don’t have any feelings.” Remus moped.

“What are you on about, of course you’ve got feelings. Look, we’re nearly there, now. Ugh, those bastards have gone on without us. Hey, do you reckon Prongs figured out how to change back?”

“She told me she loves me.” Remus said, his forehead on Sirius’s shoulder, now.

“What? Who? ...oh... right...” Sirius stopped to check he was ok. He tried to be comforting, “Well that’s good, isn’t it? Nice to hear that.”

“I didn’t say it back.”

“Oh, Moony, that’s to be expected. Doesn’t mean you haven’t got *feelings* ! I know you’ve got your heart set on being a monster, but I’m sorry to tell you that you are *not* .”

“Couldn’t say it.” Remus insisted, his voice muffled. “I don’t think I can say it to anyone. Even if I want to.”

Sirius went very quiet and very still for a while. They were at the entrance of the tunnel now, in a few moments they would be back inside the castle. Sirius gave Remus a quick hug, stroking his hair gently. He pulled away and held his hand tightly.

“That’s ok, Remus,” he whispered, even though they were alone. “That’s ok, because it’s not something you say. It’s something you do. Right?”

“Right.” Remus nodded, tearful and drunk, but somewhat placated.

“Good.” Sirius smiled again. “Now, let’s get you to bed, eh?”

“Mm.” Remus agreed. Just as Sirius was pushing the statue of the humpbacked witch aside, Remus touched his arm, “Sirius?”

“Yeah?”

“You’re magic.”

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Instant Karma' by John Lennon.

Seventh Year: Brilliant ideas

Saturday 25th February 1978

Remus didn't think he had ever hated fire whisky more. When he woke up the next morning his throat was raw, his limbs ached and his head was throbbing. He'd take a full moon over a hangover any day. At least after a full moon everyone was sympathetic.

"Urrrgh." Someone else groaned from their bed. There were loud footsteps, as whoever it was ran to the bathroom, slammed the door, and began to throw up noisily.

"Lovely." Sirius murmured from the pillow next to Remus.

"All right in there, Pete?" James shouted. He was met with an alarming gurgling sound from within the bathroom. "Bit of breakfast'll sort you out," James advised.

Remus heard James's feet hit the floor. He began to whistle a jaunty tune. Bloody perfect Potter and his immunity to hangovers.

Remus's stomach growled. Breakfast sounded good, despite the stabbing pain behind his eyeballs. Sirius raised his head at the noise and grinned,

"All right, Moony?"

"Mm." He nodded, weakly, "Thirsty. Hungry."

"S'pose I'm not getting my saturday lie in, then..." Sirius sighed over-dramatically. He whipped back the duvet, then the curtains to climb out.

Remus sat up slowly.

"Pyjamas?" He grumbled, feeling around under his pillow.

"Yeah, you put up a bit of a fight on that front," Sirius chuckled, stretching and yawning. "Said you were too hot. You threw them across the room and I gave up."

"Defeatist." Remus replied, clambering out of bed in his boxers to look for them. He'd have to go and use the shared bathroom up the hall; it didn't sound like Peter would be coming out any time soon. His eyes stung in the bright morning sunlight, and he bent over, feeling about on the floor for his pyjama shirt and bottoms like a confused gibbon.

"Morning lads," Lily said, from the end of James's bed.

"Shit!" Remus jumped, surprised, and covered his crotch with the nearest quidditch magazine, then dived back behind his bed curtain, "What the bloody hell are you doing here?!"

"I slept here." Lily replied, a grin in her voice. "I didn't know you two shared a bed."

"I didn't know *you* two shared a bed." Sirius replied, indignantly. He threw Remus his pyjamas, "There you are, Moony, make yourself decent."

Remus was going to kill James. What did he think he was playing at, inviting girls into their bedroom? Surely there was an unwritten rule on that?! Was nowhere sacred?! He pulled his pyjamas on as quick as he could over his underwear, then hurried out of the room.

"I didn't see anything!" Lily called after him, giggling.

Christ .

* * *

Thank goodness it was saturday. They made slow progress to breakfast, but in the end even Peter made it down, though he was still very pale and quiet, and just sat sipping his tea.

Remus, meanwhile loaded his plate up until he couldn't see the china pattern. Weekend breakfasts were the best; fried eggs, thick cumberland sausages, dark fried mushrooms, bacon, golden toast slathered in butter, baked beans, fried tomato, black pudding... he was seriously going to miss Hogwarts food.

"Why is Remus eating a hangover breakfast?" Mary asked, pouring herself some orange juice. "And where were you all yesterday afternoon?!"

"Think you've answered your own question, MacDonald," Sirius winked.

"You lot have all the fun." She grumbled.

"Not fun." Peter replied, his head in his hands, "Bad. Bad time."

"Have something to eat, Wormtail," Remus suggested, swallowing his own mouthful. "You'll feel better."

"I think he's frightened he'll lose an arm..." Sirius smirked, as Remus reached for another portion of bacon.

"Yeah, that was the last slice of toast, Moony!" James complained.

"Oh for goodness sake, the plates refill, don't they." Remus rolled his eyes.

"Always wondered how that happens," Mary mused, watching as the toast rack was magically replenished.

"It's not that complicated," Sirius said, "Basic teleportation spell - the house elves have tables directly beneath us in the kitchens; they load that up, then transport the food to the corresponding plates above."

"Sort of like a magical dumbwaiter." Remus nodded, now constructing himself a very complex sandwich.

"Sounds complicated to me." Mary said. "I'm useless at teleportation, though, I had to re-take my apparition test three times."

"It's easier with inanimate objects," Remus said, helping himself to ketchup, "and they're only sending it directly up, so the destination part doesn't take as much effort."

"I tried using it to clean my room once," Sirius said, "I just transported all the messy stuff into the room above mine. Except I couldn't get it back again after; my mother had an impenetrable lock on the attic. And I accidentally transported my bed, so that caused a bit of a row..."

James and Remus sniggered. Peter raised his head.

"Hm." He said.

“What?” Lily asked, “You’re not going to be sick again, are you?”

“No, I’m just thinking...”

“Merlin!” Sirius teased, “Better get him a painkilling draught...”

Peter diligently ignored him, eyes focussed on the plates of food.

“Could we do it on a bigger scale?” He asked, “The transportation thing?”

“You mean like getting food from the kitchens to our dorm?” Remus asked, “I don’t think so, I think only the house elves can do it. Would be great, though.”

“No,” Peter frown, shaking his head, “More like what Sirius was saying - with beds, and trunks, and furniture...”

“Yeah, probably,” Sirius shrugged, “I’m guessing that’s how everything ends up on the train at the end of term. Powerful bit of magic, though - it took me half a day to do my bedroom. Mind you, I was fourteen...”

“We’ve got a lot of people, though,” Peter said, now looking up at James, grinning. “We could do it.”

“Peter,” James was starting to smile now too. “Have you just had your best bloody idea in seven years of pranking?”

Peter grinned back at him, looking happier than Remus had seen him in ages.

“Emergency co-operative meeting!” James carried on, standing up, excitedly, “Spread the word!”

* * *

The problem with planning a prank between thirty people rather than four was pure logistics. Between quidditch practices, clubs, NEWT and OWL revision and room availability, calling an emergency meeting was nearly impossible. It ended up being pushed back to Sunday, then Monday - then, much to James’s exasperation - their usual Wednesday slot.

“There’s still plenty of time,” Lily soothed, “And we can always start researching it now, so we have the right spells ready to show the group.”

“S’pose.” James muttered, scuffing his feet on the flagstones as they walked back to the common room.

“I’ve got some dungbombs lying about, if you fancy blowing off some steam today...” Sirius threw an arm around James.

“Yes!”

“I can’t hear this...” Lily covered her ears and ran ahead to catch up with Mary.

On the fat lady’s corridor, Remus paused.

“You lot go on, I’ll just be a minute.” He stopped outside Professor McGonagall’s office door.

Sirius glanced back and gave him a nod of understanding, before carrying on with James and Peter, loudly arguing over the best place to plant the dungbombs.

Remus knocked on the office door, timidly.

“Enter,” came a voice from within.

He pushed the door open, and poked his head around nervously before going inside.

“Hello, professor.” He said, approaching her desk.

McGonagall was marking some essays, piled up neatly in front of her, a red quill flicking smoothly across the parchment as she read. She looked up and smiled at him pleasantly,

“Lupin, lovely to see you. Please have a seat.”

He sat carefully, strangely reminded of the very first time he’d been in her office, and how tall and frightening she had seemed. He’d really thought he would hate her, she’d seemed so much like matron. Now he was able to meet her eye, and smile back as though she were a real friend. “How can I help?” She asked, as the red quill came to rest in the inkwell beside the papers.

“I... I wanted to ask a favour,” he said, carefully. He felt inside his pockets and pulled out the letter from his mother. He put it on the desk, and slid it across. “Over Christmas the Potters helped me track down my mum. I wrote to her, and she wrote back. She’s in a muggle hospital, in Wales. I’d like to have permission to go and see her.”

McGonagall only glanced down at the letter briefly, before looking at him again.

“Of course. We can make arrangements as soon as you’d like.”

“Really?!” He was amazed it had been that easy.

“Really,” she replied, “Mr Lupin, this is a school, not a prison. Students are permitted to visit family members.”

“Oh. Well, great. I thought maybe on the next Hogsmeade weekend?”

“Certainly,” she opened a notebook and jotted something down, “Come and see me on the morning of, and I’ll write your permission slip.”

“Thank you.”

“Would you like somebody to go with you?”

“Er... no. Thanks, but no.” Now that he’d done it once, he realised that it was something he needed to do alone. He wasn’t looking forward to breaking that to Sirius, but there was no helping it.

“I’m very pleased for you, Remus,” McGonagall said, smiling again. “You know that my door is always open, if you need somebody to talk to. Though I know you aren’t short of friends.”

“Thanks,” he looked down, bashfully.

“How is your revision going, Mr Lupin?”

“Good, thanks.” Remus nodded, glad to be onto an easier subject.

“Better than good, from what I’ve heard,” she continued, smiling, “All of your professors have given excellent reports on your achievements. In most classes you’re performing well above your peers, and I hear you’ve not only been working hard for yourself, but to help others, too?”

“The study groups are a collaborative thing...” Remus said, awkwardly.

“Nevertheless,” Professor McGonagall shook her head, “I’m proud to have you in my house, Mr Lupin.”

He didn’t know what to say to that, so he just looked at his hands. “Mr Lupin,” his head of house continued, “I have a favour to ask...”

“A favour?” Remus looked up, surprised. What on earth?

“Ahem, yes...” McGonagall looked a bit sheepish, and leaned in slightly, “As I’m sure you know, the final quidditch match of the year will be taking place in April, just before exams,”

“Yeah, James has the schedule posted up in our room with an enchanted countdown in seconds and everything.”

McGonagall smiled fondly.

“James has been an absolute asset to the team, he’s led Gryffindor on a record winning streak during his time here. The team he has assembled is first rate, primed to win their sixth cup in as many years... which brings me to my problem.”

“Er... you want my help with a quidditch problem?!”

“Indeed. Now, I cannot go into too much detail, but I am sorry to say that Alexander Gordon, our beater, will be returning home for the rest of the term. I shall be telling Potter on Monday, of course, a replacement must be found as soon as possible, which is why I wanted to speak with you first..”

“Professor, I’m awful at quidditch!” Remus said, breaking out in a cold sweat.

McGonagall stared at him with a frown for a moment, before breaking into a (highly out of character) chuckle. She raised her hand to her mouth, apologetically,

“Goodness, Lupin! I didn’t mean to suggest... though I’m sure you are quite capable on a broom, it wasn’t you I had in mind.”

“Oh!” Remus exhaled, his shoulders relaxing. “Oh, good. Er... then how can I help?”

“Well,” McGonagall turned serious once more. “We do have rather a good beater already in Gryffindor. But as you are aware, he was struck off the team two years ago.”

“Sirius.”

“Now, I don’t wish to condone his behaviour, nor diminish the enormity of the incident which occurred in your fifth year...”

“No...” Remus swallowed, finding his mouth quite dry. He didn’t like to think about that, not ever. Like his hip, it was a pain which sometimes surfaced, but that he had to ignore in order to keep going.

“And I stand by the punishment he received,” his teacher continued, “But... well he was only struck off the team, he wasn’t placed under permanent ban.”

“Right,” Remus nodded, soberly. “So he can play again, if he wants to.”

“Remus, I’m not going to allow it unless you agree.” McGonagall said, placing a hand on the desk between them. “It was you that Sirius put in danger, and if you feel--”

“No.” Remus said, “I mean yes, I mean... let him back on the team.”

“Are you sure?” She peered over her spectacles at him, as if trying to read his expression.

“Absolutely!” Remus forced a smile. “Of course. It was two years ago.”

McGonagall watched him a bit longer, then smiled back, visibly relieved. He’d done the right thing, then. The thing she’d wanted.

“Thank you, Mr Lupin,” she nodded, leaning back again. “I’ll tell Potter first thing tomorrow.”

“Great.” Remus nodded, getting up from his seat. “Thanks, professor, see you Monday.”

Seventh Year: Star Star

Chapter Summary

Unpleasant Walpurga related stuff in this chapter - shit parenting in general, as well as Sirius ptsd regarding that.
C-word occurs once in this chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He could have told James and Sirius straight away, if he'd wanted to. Could have played the hero, enjoyed the spotlight and being the cause of their joy. But he didn't. He told himself it was to preserve Alexander Gordon's privacy, or to respect McGonagall's authority. But the truth was that he just didn't want anything to do with it at all.

Obviously he wanted Sirius to be happy. Obviously he didn't want to be an obstacle to Sirius's happiness. And *obviously* he wanted Gryffindor to beat Slytherin in the final match; for James to have his moment of glory. He didn't want to see Sirius punished forever for a mistake he made at sixteen. He didn't want betrayal to hang over them like that, or to bring it all up again. And yet, there it was.

Remus had forgiven Sirius, back in the Potters' bathroom two years ago; had absolved a truly repentant boy with blood on his hands and sorrowful eyes. It had been before they understood each other, before so many other *good* memories, of *good* things which had changed their friendship. But Remus hadn't forgotten how it had felt. Sirius could destroy him completely without even meaning to. If anything, Remus was even more vulnerable to that now than he had been at sixteen.

No, Remus told himself. There was a difference between atonement and revenge. Sirius had earned this.

On Monday morning, James received a note from McGonagall, asking to see him before quidditch practice. He hurried off without even finishing his breakfast - nothing was more important than the final match. Marlene and Yaz began speculating on what it could be, Peter and Sirius leaning across the table eagerly to join in. Remus just waited, feeling half pleased and half something else. As breakfast was finishing, James's muffled voice began emanating from the two-way mirror Sirius's robe pocket.

"Padfoot! Padfoot! Quidditch pitch! Now!"

"What'dyou reckon he wants?" Sirius scratched his head as they got up from the table.

"Oh, I think you'll like it." Remus replied, cryptically. "Go on, he sounds excited."

"You know what it is, don't you?" Sirius eyed him suspiciously.

"Maybe."

"Don't you want me to walk you to Care of Magical Creatures?"

“I’ll manage. Go! Hurry!”

Remus didn’t see James and Sirius again until lunch, and both of them were grinning from ear to ear. James had the quidditch schedule out and was marking out extra practice days so that Sirius could get back up to speed.

“You were right,” Sirius beamed, practically bouncing in his seat as Remus arrived, “I did like it.”

Remus just smiled back. It was enough to see him happy; and if love *was* something you did, then Remus hoped this was enough.

“What are you so happy about?” Marlene asked, sitting down opposite the boys.

“Say hello to your new beater,” Sirius burst out.

James laughed, nodding.

“Oh!” Marlene smiled brightly, “Excellent! Er... what happened to Gordon?”

“Gone home.” James replied, “Not supposed to ask.”

“Ah. Well, anyway,” Marlene shook her head, “That’s fantastic, I’ve missed having you watching my back. So how come McGonagall let you? I thought you got kicked off for doing something unspeakable...?”

“Oh yeah,” Mary added, stirring grated cheese into her leek and potato soup, “I remember something like that too, what did you do?”

Sirius visibly balked at this, his eyes widening.

Remus frowned slightly. Was this the first time it had occurred to him? Had Remus been agonising over the implications of an event Sirius barely even remembered?! He decided to rescue him, nonetheless,

“Ha, you can’t expect Sirius to remember every stupid stunt he pulls that gets him into trouble.” He said, cheerfully.

The girls accepted this, and lunch continued, but Remus could feel Sirius’s eyes on him the whole time. Apparently he had caught up. *Well*, Remus thought, *at least it only takes him a few hours now. This time last year it would have been months.*

Throughout the rest of the afternoon lessons, Remus’s gut instinct was to be evasive; to make a quick get away after his final class and stay in the library as late as he could, then go straight to bed without speaking.

But really, he tried to reason with himself, wasn’t that just another way to punish Sirius? It certainly didn’t demonstrate forgiveness. He hadn’t forgotten their recent fight, and how Sirius had called him ‘bloody exhausting’. It had actually hurt his feelings quite a lot, at the time, and he knew that this was because it was so painfully true.

So. He’d try it Sirius’s way.

“Fancy a walk after dinner?” He asked, casually, tapping the box of matches where he kept his cigarettes and - sometimes - something more recreational.

“Yeah,” Sirius smiled, surprised, “Sounds good.”

Pudding appeared on the table in front of them. James was taking notes on the teleportation mechanism, and kept picking up plates as soon as they emptied, to see if they would refill in mid-air, or land on the table itself.

“Potter if you drop *even one* treacle tart I’ll have your guts for garters...” Lily threatened.

* * *

It was easy enough for them to get away that evening, and they wandered towards to astronomy tower, because the evenings were nice now that winter was finally on it way out, and no one would have a go at them for smoking.

They interrupted a couple of fifth years clumsily groping on the parapets, and used their seventh year privilege to send them on their way.

“Honestly, when we were their age, we never...” Sirius tutted disapprovingly.

“Sure you want to finish that?” Remus raised a wry eyebrow.

They settled down. Remus rolled up his robes to use as a cushion, and they sat with their backs to the wall, companionably rolling spliffs. “I’m really happy for you.” Remus started, after his first inhale. “About the quidditch. You deserve it.”

“Thanks,” Sirius nodded, sounding relieved. “I really... um. I asked James, and he said McGonagall asked you if it was ok first.”

“She did.” Remus agreed, keeping his voice steady. “Obviously I said it was fine. Obviously.”

“I’m really grateful. You didn’t have to, I would have understood.”

“Really?” Remus looked at him, finally.

“Of course,” Sirius said, earnestly, “I deserved to be struck off; I deserved to be *expelled* for what I did. Locked up in Azkaban. I got off easy, and I know it.”

“I never wanted you to suffer.” Remus said. “I hated you for it - I won’t lie. But I forgave you then, and I can’t keep holding a grudge. You’ve made it up to me, like you said you would.”

He felt a bit light-headed, saying all of this. It wasn’t much, no, but he knew they both felt the weight of the words. Sirius had always tried to understand him harder than anyone.

“Still,” Sirius replied, placing a hand over Remus’s, “If you’re still angry about it, that’s ok. I still feel guilty about it. It’s the worst thing I’ve ever done.”

“We don’t have to talk about it...” Remus shifted uncomfortably. *He* really didn’t want to talk about it.

“I just wanted you to know that I *do* still feel responsible. I don’t blame anyone but myself - not even Snivellus. Not even... not even her.”

“Who?” Remus frowned, lost.

He felt Sirius’s leg stiffen beside him, saw his hand tremble just for a moment.

“My mother.” He said, quietly. His breathing was shallow, and he spoke so quietly Remus had to strain his ears to catch it all. “Do you remember what happened that Christmas? It was when I got

kicked out...”

Remus nodded. How could he ever forget? It had been one of the worst nights of his life, and he had had more than his fair share.

Sirius continued, looking down at his knees, curling up smaller against the stone rampart.

“She’d done stuff before - I mean, you know about that, the cutting, and the silencing and that time she vanished my hair. But - and I know this sounds weird - I never thought she’d do... *that* . She threatened to disown me all the time, threatened to do all sorts. But until they started getting in deep with Voldemort, I never really believed her.”

He paused, apparently to take a few deep breaths, then pressed on bravely. “It was always the most important thing, when I was growing up; family. Family loyalty. I know they froze out Andromeda, but mother knew we were still in touch, she didn’t try to stop it. So I thought - well, they must be planning to forgive her one day. Bring her back into the fold; because she was *family* . And it was arrogant of me, but I really never thought it would happen to *me* .”

He looked at Remus, bashfully, as if he had said something idiotic, and expected to be teased. Remus said nothing, only gripped his hand. Sirius sighed.

“But then it did happen - and they’d punished me *so many* times before, I thought I knew what to expect. But not like that. I’d never been so... so scared.” His eyes were shimmering now, and he was staring angrily ahead, “I hated it, feeling that way, and all I could think, lying in bed at the Potters, was how you or James would have done better. Been braver, or figured out away to fight back. I didn’t fight back, because... because they were my family.”

“Sirius...” Remus tried to sound gentle, but Sirius shook his head, wiping his eyes quickly,

“No, it’s ok, I’m not telling you so you feel sorry for me, I’m not making excuses. There’s no excuse. I’m just... I dunno, trying to explain. Anyway; that happened at Christmas, and then I was living at the Potters after that, so it was all ok, for me, wasn’t it? Like... I was safe, and I had nothing to be scared of. But I still felt like she could get me. I had these nightmares, remembering the curse. Sorry, I know it sounds stupid.”

“It doesn’t sound stupid at all!”

“Still. I felt like I had to do something, and maybe I didn’t always have the best ideas. You know what I was like - all over the place, acting like a twat. Me and James, we both used to egg each other on, didn’t we? And Snape was so easy to pick on, because he’s so foul and nasty already. Godric, *so* nasty. He tried to attack Mary, and then him and Reg tried to hurt you too, remember? And he just kept going, no matter what we did. And I just... not like Snape is like my mother or anything - I think there are at least six degrees of evil between them - but he made me feel the way *she* made me feel. Like I couldn’t control it. I just wanted to make him scared; make him feel it too, so that maybe he’d stop. It’s no excuse, and I’m *so sorry* , Moony.”

Remus had not let go of Sirius’s hand. Something strange was happening inside of him. Something which he had rarely felt outside of a full moon. A fierce and overwhelming desire to *protect* this boy sitting next to him. To make sure he was never frightened again. He pulled Sirius to him, taking his spliff and pressing their lips together.

“It’s forgiven.” He said, “I mean it.”

Sirius didn’t speak, just looked up at him, grateful and happy, and Remus thought if he could bottle

that look then he'd never struggle with a patronus again. "And you can blame your mother for it if you like." Remus said, pulling away, "She sounds like a right cunt."

Sirius snorted with laughter and buried his face in Remus's shoulder,

"You oik," he chuckled, gleefully. "I really bloody l--"

"Who's up here?!" Mary came tiptoeing around the corner. "Oh." She sighed, upon seeing them. "I was hoping you were Marlene and Yaz, been trying to catch them for ages, finally put an end to this sneaking around malarkey."

Sirius leaned back against the wall, wiping his eyes quickly.

"All right, MacDonald," he grinned, squinting up at her.

"Ohhh, is that what I think it is?" Mary glimpsed the spliff in Remus's hand, "Sharesies!"

* * *

Friday 10th March 1978 - Just before midnight.

"Moony! Where have you gone? They're going to do your cake before James really gets drunk..." Sirius called up the stairs.

Remus smirked to himself, tipsily. James was too far gone already, if you asked him. He'd been leaping all over the common room furniture to 'Jean Genie' for half an hour already.

"Yeah I'll just be a sec!" Remus called back.

He was looking for something to use as a vase, and finally settled on transfiguring an old Wellington boot which must have been one of Peter's from first year. "*Aguamente*," he murmured, his wandwork a bit sloppy from the cider. He had thought cider would be a smarter choice than whisky, but if anything it seemed to have made him stupider than normal.

He dunked the bunch of tulips into the very rubbery looking vase, and grinned to himself.

"What are you doing up here?" Sirius came in, now. He was drunk too; he had acquired a wide brimmed mauve hat from somewhere, and was wearing it at a jaunty angle. "Flowers?" He looked confused.

"Er yeah. From one of the Hufflepuffs in my study group,"

"Who's giving you flowers?!"

"Miranda O'dell. Fourth year."

"But *why*?!"

"I asked her to," Remus smirked, enjoying the game.

Sirius threw his hands up,

"Moony! I am too drunk for your puzzles!"

"They're for Hope," Remus poked his tongue out. "Seeing her tomorrow, remember?"

“Oh yeah!” Sirius smiled again, eyes practically violet under the shade of his ridiculously flattering purple hat. “Looking forward to it?”

“D’you know what, I sort of am? At least I don’t want to throw up, like last time.”

“Progress!” Sirius flung his arms out. The volume of the music downstairs increased by a good few decibels, as that trilling guitar started all over again, and James’s voice could be heard booming;

“A small Jean Genie snuck off to the city, strung out on lasers and slash-back blazers, ate all your razors while pulling the waiters...”

“James really likes this song, eh?” Remus grinned, hands in his pockets, enjoying being away from it all for a little bit.

“After years of trying, Bowie finally got through to him.” Sirius returned, taking a few coy steps towards Remus, leaning against the bedpost in that devastatingly casual way. “Are you enjoying your party?” He tilted his head down as he asked, eyes big and flirtatious as a girl’s.

“Very much,” Remus bobbed his head, returning the smile.

“Someone invited Lockhart, the prick.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, how come he’s like that, anyway?!”

Remus just shrugged, eyes fixed on the way Sirius swung his hips unconsciously back and forth in time with the bass reverberating from the floorboards. When they left school, Remus would buy him a hundred pairs of black jeans, and that would be all he’d allow him to wear.

“Want your present?” Sirius asked, suddenly, catching Remus’s eye.

“You already got me a present!” Remus protested. A full year’s supply of chocolate frogs - though Remus was pretty sure he could polish it off by the time exams were over.

“I’m allowed to get you more than one thing.” Sirius said, petulantly.

He stood away from the bed, legs apart, and waved his hands flamboyantly through the air like a muggle magician. Then, with a dramatic bow, he swept the hat from his head in one fluid motion, delved his hand inside and withdrew a small metal thing.

He handed it to Remus, who could smell that it was solid gold. It was a rectangular case, just bigger than his palm. It had the same leafy vine like design as his gold pocket watch, and felt good and weighty in his hand. He snapped it open to find a row of eighteen neatly rolled cigarettes nestled inside. The inside lid also had a design on it, delicately etched so that the finely hewn lines gleamed when they caught the light. It was a glimmering night sky, with a large, celestial moon in one corner, and Canis Major picked out in mother of pearl inlay.

“Sirius.” Remus said quietly, staring at it.

“So you can get rid of that manky old matchbox.”

“Thank you... it’s beautiful.”

“Oi you two, hurry up or Wormtail’s going to start on the cake!” James screamed up the stairs, ignoring Lily’s attempts to shush him.

Remus and Sirius grinned at each other, and headed down, holding hands right until the bottom step.

The common room was in an incredible state; barely recognisable. Multi coloured fairy lights hung from every rafter, balloons drifted up and down like weird bloated jellyfish, the suits of armour occasionally belched flame-free fireworks, and there were people on every stretch of carpet and bottles on every surface.

“ Jean Genie! Lives on his back! Jean Genie! Loves chimney stacks! He’s outrageous, he screams and he bawls... ”

Most of the revellers were now leaping around the room with all the grace and dignity of kids on pogo sticks, led by James, Peter, Lily and Mary, who were jumping the most vigorously. James stopped when he saw Remus, and raised his arms cheering,

“Moonyyyyy!”

“Cake!” Peter began to chant, “Cake, cake cake!”

Everybody joined in, and the crowd parted for Christopher and Marlene, who carried between them an enormous rectangular cake, the size of an overstuffed pillowcase. As they brought it to Remus, he saw with a flush of delight that it was decorated with chocolate buttercream icing to look like a gigantic leatherbound book.

“My two favourite things,” he laughed, ignoring the elbow in the ribs from Sirius.

He blew out the candles, and cut the cake, making the same wish both times. After that, James started leading everyone in a series of toasts; each more convoluted and elaborate than the last, encouraged by Sirius and Peter. That meant at least two more pints of cider, and some of Mary’s witches brew when he ran out.

Remus’s last memory of his eighteenth birthday party was some lunatic deciding to put on *Goats Head Soup* - which had to be his least favourite Rolling Stones album, but he was pissed and he didn’t care. The jumping and flailing continued, and the room was hot and loud and sweaty, and everyone was red faced and grinning - and Remus didn’t even care when Lily and James pointed and laughed at him as the final track began to play and everyone belted out at the top of their lungs;

“ If I ever get back to New York, girl

Gonna make you scream all night

Yeah! You're a star fucker, star fucker, star fucker, star fucker, star!

Yeah, a star fucker, star fucker, star fucker, star fucker, star!

A star fucker, star fucker, star fucker, star fucker star!”

Chapter End Notes

Songs in this chapter are Jean Genie by David Bowie and Star Star by The Rolling Stones (the rest of the lyrics are gross, be prepared).

Lots of call-backs in this chapter. If you want to piece together Sirius's thought process...

Sirius was kicked out of Grimmauld Place around Christmas of fifth year, the following chapters deal with this:

- Chapter 80: Fifth Year: 'Twas the night before Christmas
- Chapter 81: Fifth Year: Unforgivable

The Snape Incident(s) took place at the end of fifth year, in these chapters:

- Chapter 89: Fifth Year: The Week Before
- Chapter 90: Fifth Year: OWLs
- Chapter 91: Fifth Year: The week following

(also worth mentioning that Remus and Sirius's first kiss was between these two events, in chapter 86)

Remus forgave Sirius during Summer 1976, in this chapter:

- Chapter 95: Summer 1976 (part three: Peace Talks)

Seventh Year: Hospital Visits

Chapter Summary

This chapter has lots of sad, parent related stuff to do with the Lupin family, so bear in mind before reading. (No deaths, I promise!)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

She loved tulips. She loved daisies. She loved forget-me-nots, and gerberas and roses and daffodils - she loved every flower he brought her. He always tried to bring something. Flowers were free, as long as he kept Madam Sprout on side, and Hope hadn't much appetite, so chocolate was no good.

They had five more meetings over the spring of 1978, and Remus would forever mark each of them by the flowers he'd brought to her. The conversations they had too, of course - but the flowers seemed to bookend everything; colouring each session with its own personality.

Tulips had presided over their second meeting. They were orange, pink and yellow, with sturdy dusky green stems and sumptuous velvet petals. A very generous flower, Remus thought.

She was ready for him, this time; she'd had her hair washed and combed, and it gleamed sunny platinum blonde against the pink hospital blankets. She'd put a spot of makeup on, too, though Remus felt bad for noticing that, because he felt he ought not to care how she looked.

"I got my sister to dig out some pictures," Hope said eagerly, tapping a brown paper envelope on her bedside, as Remus set down the weird vase he'd drunkenly transfigured.

"What are they pictures of?" He asked, cautiously, pulling up a seat beside her. He didn't want to be caught unawares by anything too painful.

"Some of you, as a baby," she smiled with shiny coral lips, "Some of me and your father."

"Lyll." Remus said, quickly.

"Me and Lyll," she corrected herself, out of politeness.

Hope would bend over backwards to save Remus even the smallest upset; that much was clear from the beginning. He found it unsettling; very few people had ever cared about his feelings so intensely before.

He picked up the envelope, and held it for a moment.

"You don't have to look. We can do it another time." Hope said, a tremor of fear in her voice. He didn't want to frighten her. He wanted to tell her not to worry; that he wasn't going to run away, or disappear forever; that he wanted to be there, and get to know her. But that was all too much, so he just opened the package and smiled,

"No, I want to see."

Fortunately there weren't very many - but he was surprised to find that more than half of the photographs were magical, and the images moved in his hands like film reels.

"I've had to keep them hidden," Hope confided, "Lyall never liked the usual sort of photography; he said they were too flat."

"How old is he, in this one?" Remus held up a photograph of both of his parents, standing in someone's back garden. Lyall was wearing a muggle suit, and they were both squinting against the sunshine, but smiling. He had his arm around Hope's waist.

"Oh, I think we'd only met a few weeks before that was taken," Hope said, taking it from him to look closer, "He'd have been... thirty, I think?"

Remus looked at it again. He knew he looked like Lyall, he'd been told so a few times, and to some extent he agreed. They were both gangly; tall and skinny with bad posture. But Lyall looked more at ease than Remus had ever felt in his over-long body; his movements in the photograph were confident and self-assured.

She let him take the pictures back to school, and he tentatively showed his friends. Over his seven years at Hogwarts, he had been shown a lot of family photos. Peter and James kept pictures in frames on their bedside, or else tacked up on the walls over their dressers. Lily had an album that she flipped through when she was homesick, and Mary had a shoebox full of holiday snaps, Christmases, postcards and pictures of her cousins in Jamaica. So it was a surprisingly nice experience, Remus thought, being able to share his own modest collection.

"That's them," he said, shyly, as they sat around the fireplace, "They're my parents."

"Remus you look just like your dad!" Lily said, meaning to be kind.

"Wow, look at your mum's hair!" Mary grinned, "What a glamour puss!"

"Ahhh!" James snatched another picture, waving it at everyone, "Look at little baby Moony!"

It was silly, Remus knew, but he even felt the beginnings of pride, sharing his family like that. Proof that he'd been normal, once; just like his friends. *This is who I am. This is who I came from.*

One afternoon he even returned to the Ravenclaw corridor to see the duelling trophy with Lyall's name on it. It was the same as ever, but no longer gave him that mysterious ache of longing as it had in second year.

Christopher and Marlene walked past, while he was looking at it.

"Oh, 'Lupin'!" Christopher said, surprised, peering into the case to read the trophy, "Is that your dad? Cool!"

"Thanks," Remus put his hands in his pockets, suddenly bashful. Marlene touched his shoulder in a friendly, comforting way. He smiled at her, gratefully. "I met my mum recently," Remus explained to Christopher, "And it just had me thinking."

"You met your mum? I thought your parents were dead." Christopher scratched his head. Honestly, if it wasn't written down in a book then he could be incredibly dense about some things.

"Just Lyall." Remus said, calmly, nodding at the trophy.

"So if your mum's ok, why did you live in a home?"

“Shut up, Chris.” Marlene said, tutting. She slipped her arm through Remus’s, linking them together, “Come on, love, it’s dinner soon.” She began to lead him away.

“I didn’t mean to be rude!” Christopher said, hurrying along behind them.

“It’s ok.” Remus reassured him, doing some quick thinking. “My mum’s in the hospital; she’s not been well enough to look after me.” It was only half a lie.

* * *

“What was he like?” Remus asked Hope, next time he saw her. A pot of geraniums, this time, bright red and gaudy, with lovely wide leaves like chinese fans.

“Lyll?” She asked.

He nodded, braced for impact.

“He was the cleverest man I ever met.” Hope said, decisively. “I never understood half the things he said, but I loved to listen - and he loved to talk.”

“Sounds a bit... arrogant?” Remus said, uncomfortably. Hope laughed,

“Oh, he was arrogant, all right! He knew it, too. Always had to be right, had to have the last word. We fought like cat and dog over it, sometimes.” She saw Remus’s look of dismay, and hurried to clarify, “I loved him for it, though. I loved how sure he was; how reliable. He never let me down.”

Yes he did. Remus thought, bitterly. She was forgetful about things like that - perhaps it was her illness, or just a side effect of a shortened life. She was relentlessly optimistic, unable to find fault in the people she loved.

She told him how they’d met, like it was a fairytale.

“I was walking home from work one afternoon - I was an operator at the telephone exchange, back then. I took a shortcut - same one I always did, from the main bus stop in town - through a little bit of woodland. Then, from out of nowhere, this man came and attacked me - a vagrant, I thought, or an escaped prisoner. I screamed, and it was Lyll who saved me. Well, I loved him the moment he held me in his arms; he was a hero. Of course, he told me later it had only been a boggart, but it was still very brave, wasn’t it?”

Remus nodded absently.

“I’ve met some people who knew him,” He said, “They’ve told me he had a bad temper.”

“What? No.” She frowned, “He got het up sometimes - don’t we all? But he was always kind, and always gentle with us. He hated violence.”

“Right.” Remus nodded. He never knew what to think about Lyll. Nothing about him ever felt real, because nothing Remus ever learnt could wipe away what he’d done.

Conversations with Hope weren’t always difficult. Often they were very pleasant; they talked about small, inconsequential things; likes and dislikes, favourite foods, favourite films or songs.

She loved The Beatles, and Fairport Convention - and most of all she liked Simon and Garfunkel. She like sad songs. She hummed along to ‘The Only Living Boy in New York’, when it came on the record player, but ‘America’ was her favourite, because it made her cry. *I’m empty and aching*

and I don't know why.

Sometimes she was very unwell, and she dozed, wavering in and out of consciousness. He just sat by and read his book until it was time to go. She even asked him to read to her, once or twice,

"I don't care what it's about, I just like your voice," she would smile under heavy eyelids. He liked those times; he really felt like they belonged to each other, then.

"Have you asked her why, yet?" Sirius asked him one evening, when he'd returned from a day at the hospital.

"Asked her why what?" Remus yawned, stretching out and placing his feet in Sirius's lap. He thought they could get away with that - it wasn't *too* intimate, and the common room was relatively quiet.

"You know. Why she never got in touch."

Remus frowned. He leaned his head back on the arm of the settee and stared up at the ceiling.

"No." He said, "I don't see the point asking."

"I'd want to know." Sirius replied, fiddling with Remus's bootlaces.

"Well." Remus replied, coldly, "That's you."

"Ok," Sirius replied, "Sorry."

Remus felt a twinge of guilt. Sirius had been extremely sensitive about bringing up Hope, letting Remus take the lead when it came to discussing it, so it wasn't fair to snap.

In truth, he was terrified. He wanted very much to know exactly what Hope had been doing with herself for thirteen years, but he knew that there was no answer that would satisfy him. The other children that had been mentioned by the nurse on his first visit were never brought up, and she didn't wear a wedding ring. There were no other photographs around her hospital bed, and no sign that anyone else was visiting.

And Remus was selfish. He liked having Hope all to himself; pretending there was no one else in the world. It was the only way they could communicate for now, he decided; to shut out all the noise of other people, and just be themselves together.

"That's a big book," she smiled, waking up halfway through another visit. Daisies, that time; big, cheerful, friendly flowers. "What's it about?"

"History revision." He explained, closing it carefully, now she was awake. "I've got my final exams coming up."

"Clever boy," she murmured, her eyelids fluttering. "What's your best subject?"

"Um... History, I s'pose." He replied, "But I'm good at Charms, and I like Care of Magical Creatures a lot."

"Just like your dad," she smiled, eyes closing. Her face was very pale, that day, and he didn't try to correct her, she was obviously exhausted. "Maybe you'll save a pretty girl from a boggart, one day." She chuckled quietly.

"Yeah, maybe." He replied. Then, because he felt bad about lying, "I like Transfiguration, too, but

my friend Sirius is the best in the class - he can turn himself into a dog and everything.”

She smiled,

“Sirius is a nice name.”

“Yeah. Sirius Black.” Remus said. He was glad her eyes were closed, it made things easier. “He’s my best friend. ...I mean, I have a lot of friends, but he’s the most... we’re probably going to live together, after school finishes.”

“That’ll be nice...” she fell asleep again. Remus fidgeted for a bit, feeling anxious, then returned to his revision. He woke her up just before he had to leave, though.

“See you next week?” She clasped his hand with surprising strength.

“No, sorry,” he shook his head, “I... next Friday is a full moon, so I won’t be able to travel on Saturday.”

“Full moon...” she murmured, taking a few seconds to understand. When the fog cleared she had a sharp look of panic which Remus couldn’t bear,

“Maybe I can come on Sunday, though. I’ll see.” He bent down and kissed her cheek, very lightly. She began to cry, and he had to go. He was halfway across the ward when he heard her mutter, very quietly,

“Damn you, Lyall Lupin, you bastard.”

Chapter End Notes

Song lyric taken from 'America' by Simon and Garfunkel.

Remus first discovers the duelling trophy in Chapter 35.

Seventh Year: Breakdown

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

If I seem a little jittery I can't restrain myself

I'm falling into fancy fragments

Can't contain myself

I gotta breakdown, breakdown, yeah

I gotta breakdown, breakdown, yeah

Friday 24th March 1978

03:00 AM

Remus rolled over again. He couldn't sleep; he was too hot with the duvet on; too cold if he pushed it off. His legs kept getting all tangled up in the bedsheets, his pillow had lumps in it, and somewhere in Gryffindor tower a tap was dripping, which was driving him insane. On top of this, he just didn't *feel* tired.

He sighed heavily and rolled over again. Beside him, Sirius groaned.

"Moony, you are my best friend, and I would probably dive in front of a curse for you, but if you wake me up one more time then I cannot be held responsible for my actions." He said this all without opening his eyes.

"Sorry," Remus whispered, "I think it's the moon, I can't sleep."

"Mmmrgh."

"Sorry."

He got out of bed. It was no use keeping both of them up.

Outside of the bed curtains, in the early morning gloom of their bedroom, Remus stood at the window for a while. It was a clear night, and the moon was almost full. Just one slither missing; he wondered if he had ever seen a full moon with his own human eyes. Perhaps he'd been too young to remember.

The forest beneath the moon was black with shadow, and it seemed unbelievable to Remus that in only a few hours he and his friends would be running through those dark mysterious trees as if it was their own personal playground. Just now, it looked terrifying; a great black pit that could swallow you whole.

Only four more moons at Hogwarts. And then what?

He put that thought away for another time.

Remus looked at his own empty bed, unenthusiastically. The curtains hadn't been drawn over for weeks, because he never slept there; only used it for homework. As a consequence it was covered with books, broken quills, chocolate wrappers, scrunched up balls of paper. Even if it had been tidy, the sheets looked somehow cold and uninviting in the moonlight. He'd have sighed again, but he didn't want to make any more noise.

There were some biscuits in the common room. A tin of garibaldi's from Mrs Potter. If he took his book and his fags, he could have quite a pleasant few hours before he finally fell asleep or it was time for breakfast. His stomach growled, and that was the decision made. He pulled on a pair of thick socks (they were Peter's, actually, but he never minded lending stuff like that too much), picked up his wand and his book, and crept down to the common room, careful to step over the squeaky stair as he did.

As Remus pushed open the door to the common room, he realised too late that he was not alone. The fireplace was roaring, and the lamps around the couches glowing warmly. A figure was curled up on the largest red velvet settee, wrapped in a thick maroon blanket, with just a long black plait poking out of the top. In the armchair, clutching a mug of warm ovaltine, staring fixedly at the fire, was Marlene. She looked up as he entered, and Remus had no choice but to smile affably and approach her.

As he neared, he could see that her eyes were dark and heavy, her cheeks red and tearstained.

"Hi," he said, low, so as not to wake Yaz.

She gave a small, faraway smile, unfurling slightly, wiping her cheeks.

"Hi."

"You ok?" He stood just close enough. He didn't want to know the answer. He regretted everything, and wished with every fibre of his being that he was back in bed with Sirius, getting kicked in the shin every time he rolled over.

Marlene shook her head mournfully, staring at the fire, her eyes filling up with tears. It was a familiar sight, these days, and not just Marlene. Bad news was so common. Family members in hospital, or dead, or - worse than either - missing.

"I said he could get in touch through the fireplace, if he wanted to talk tonight." She whispered, her voice hoarse as an old woman's. "Danny. It's the full moon tomorrow. Well, tonight, I suppose." She glanced at the grandfather clock.

"Oh, is it?" Remus assumed as casual an air as possible.

Marlene nodded, still looking at the fire.

"It has to be tonight, you see; he's going to the ministry tomorrow and they'll lock him up in the cells there. I wanted to go home for it, but he says there's nothing I can do."

"I suppose there isn't." Remus's stomach was clenching so hard he wanted to double over, he was so nervous and jittery already. "He'll be ok..." he tried, hoping he sounded kind.

"He'll survive it." She said, bitterly. "But I don't think he'll be ok. It takes a bit of you away, every time. I've seen them, at St Mungo's. And... he told me. How it feels."

"Why?!"

"I asked." She shrugged. "Madam Pomfrey says I have a curious mind, that's why I'll be a good healer. I wanted to know, so I could help. But he was so down after last month, so weak."

"I'm sure just being there for him helps." Remus tried.

Marlene wiped her eyes again with her sleeves.

"It just doesn't seem like enough." She sighed heavily, and her focus seemed to return a bit. She looked at him properly, for the first one, "Sorry love, is everything ok with you? What are you doing up?"

"Oh, just couldn't sleep." He raised his book to demonstrate.

"Me neither. I knew Danny probably wouldn't try to get through, but I couldn't go to bed, just in case. Poor Yaz tried her best," she gave the girl sleeping on the couch an affectionate look. "She's too good for me by half."

"Personally I don't think anyone's good *enough* for you." Remus said - though it wasn't him speaking, not really - they were Sirius's words. He'd noticed himself sounding more and more like Sirius, and found he didn't mind it. Anyway, it made Marlene smile again.

"Lovely boy." She said, softly. "Sit down, eh? You're making me nervous hovering like that."

He sat awkwardly on the the sofa opposite Yaz. Marlene sat up, stretching, as though her back hurt. As she unfolded her legs from underneath her a quill fell onto the floor.

"Oops," she leaned over to pick it up, "I was going to try and write him a letter. But I don't know what to say." She pulled the blank parchment out from the side of the armchair cushion.

Remus sat stiffly with his book on his lap.

"Is it really a cell they put him in? At the ministry?" He asked, unable to contain his grim curiosity. She stood up to stretch more, and nodded,

"Yeah. Mum said. He wouldn't tell me about it - which means it must be bad. Mum said it's better I don't know too much..."

"Mmm." Remus kept with mouth shut, not trusting himself. Marlene tilted her head sympathetically,

"I'm so sorry, Remus, I didn't even think. I feel awful whinging to you about this, given your situation."

"What?!" He stared up at her, his heart skipping a beat.

"With your mum being in the hospital," Marlene replied, yawning, setting down the quill and parchment on the coffee table between them. "No wonder you can't sleep, either."

"Oh, yeah..." He willed himself to calm down. "Yeah. It's ok, though, I understand."

"Can I sit with you for a bit? You can read your book, I won't bother you." She asked, biting her lip. "I just don't want to be the only one awake."

"Yeah, of course."

To his surprise, she didn't sit back down, but came over to join him on the couch. She settled in,

making herself comfortable, pulling a blanket up to her chin. He pretended to do the same, opening his book and leaning casually against the arm of the chair.

“Revision?” She asked, resting her cheek on his shoulder.

“What else,” he replied. “Advanced Arithmancy.”

“Oh Remus,” she yawned again, her voice thick, “How *fascinating* .” She relaxed a bit, and rested a hand on his knee. He gave it a quick squeeze for comfort.

“You know me,” he said softly, joining in her sarcasm, “I live dangerously.”

She gave a quiet chuckle, her eyes closing. He read, and felt her heartbeat steady, her breathing even out, and in only a few minutes she was fast asleep, a dead weight curled up against him. He didn’t mind; it was quite nice.

Remus stopped reading after Marlene had fallen asleep. He gently closed his book and just sat pondering for a while. He could smell the salt of her tears drying on her skin, and the anxiety in her blood. And he couldn’t get Danny out of his mind, in an imagined Ministry of Magic cell - probably underground, probably bare and dark and cold...

The pain would be a real shock, if you’d never experienced it before, Remus thought. He could well imagine that the second full moon would feel even worse; because you’d know what was coming. No wonder Danny didn’t want to talk about it.

If what Marlene said was true, then her brother had no one else to ask about it. No one to tell him that if you tried to fight the transformation; if you tried to brace yourself against it, then it only hurt more. That murtlap essence was best for the initial cuts, but if you used muggle disinfectant too then the skin knit back together neater. Then there were the things that Remus wasn’t sure if *anyone* knew - about the scent of magic, or how you could draw from it. How it made you stronger, as long as you could channel it right. How being a werewolf meant lots of things, and not all of them were awful.

No closer to sleep, Remus reached for the blank bit of parchment and began to write.

* * *

I feel my brain like porridge coming outta my ears

And I was anticipating reverie

Taken leave of my senses and I'm in arrears

My legs buckle over, I'm living on my knees

I gotta breakdown, yeah

You gimme breakdown, yeah

I'm gonna breakdown, yeah, uh-huh

Friday 24th March 1978

5:30 pm

“You don’t have to walk me,” Remus snapped, irritably, “I know where the hospital wing is.”

“I know,” Sirius replied, cheerfully, getting up anyway.

James, Peter and Lily all looked down at their food

“You haven’t finished your dinner.” Remus frowned.

“Nor have you.”

“That’s because I don’t want to puke all over myself when the crippling agony hits.” Remus muttered, darkly.

Sirius glanced down at their friends, staring stalwartly at their empty plates.

“C’mon, Moony, let’s go…” he said, a bit more gently.

Remus shoved his hands deep in his robe pockets and strode quickly out of the Great Hall, forcing Sirius to jog slightly to keep up. “Hey!” The dark haired boy hurried after him.

Remus didn’t slow down until they were halfway to the hospital wing.

“Ok, I get it, you’re in one of your dark moods,” Sirius puffed.

“I’m always in a dark mood.” Remus tutted. “You ought to stop smoking, how are we going to beat Slytherin if you’re so out of breath you can’t keep up with *me* ?”

“You can talk,” Sirius straightened up. “This is the first time I’ve seen you without a fag in your mouth for weeks. Anyway. What’s wrong?”

“Really? You have to ask.” Remus sped up again.

“Ok, ok,” Sirius grabbed his arm to slow him down, “You’re not sleeping and you couldn’t have dinner even though pudding was millionaire shortbread, which is your favourite… Fair enough, I’d be grumpy too.”

“I’m not ‘grumpy’.” Remus objected.

“Touchy, then.”

“Fuck *off*.” Remus practically growled. “Leave me alone if you’re going to be an arse.”

“I’m just trying to keep things in perspective!”

“You don’t understand.”

“Make me understand!”

They were near-ish the hospital wing now, and everyone was at dinner, so the corridor was empty - which was lucky, because Remus didn’t check before he completely lost his rag.

“*Make* you understand?!” He raved, “Fucking hell, ok, go on then. Understand that I’m climbing the bloody walls with worrying and stressing and… it’s NEWTs and the bloody moon and my fucking mother crying because I can’t see her tomorrow because my fucking dad couldn’t control his fucking temper and now I’m… and *Marlene* crying over her brother, which wasn’t even my fucking fault, but it bloody well feels like it, and school’s nearly finished, and there’s a war on, and

a quidditch match and this big prank, and my hip hurts, and I'm just *tired* , and I really, really wanted pudding!"

He felt foolish, once it was over, but a bit better too. Like there had been a balloon inflating in his chest all this time, and it had finally popped, giving him space to breathe again. He stood there, glaring at Sirius, waiting for a reaction.

"*My goodness .*" The portrait across from them said. She was a very stern looking witch, seated in a high backed wooden chair. "I've never heard such disgusting language."

"Oh piss off you daft old trollop." Sirius shot at her, in a very good imitation of Remus. He looked at Remus again, and his face cracked into a smile, "You want to sit down for a bit? I think that's the most you've ever said in one go."

Remus exhaled, and smiled weakly back.

"Sorry."

"For what? Come on, Madam Pomfrey'll be having kittens..." They carried on their way, and the air was cleared, and nothing seemed quite so grim. Still, Remus hated Sirius having to go; knowing that the next time they'd see each other neither of them would be quite themselves.

"So the way I see it," Sirius said, still cheerful, after all that, "If I run back to the hall as fast as I can, I can get the last of the millionaire shortbread and wrap it up for you to have for breakfast. Anything else I can do to help?"

"You're such a wanker sometimes."

"Yep."

"Actually, there is something..."

"*Anything .*"

"Er... could you post this, for me?" Remus handed him a sealed envelope. Sirius took it, looking down with a frown.

"Are you sure?"

"No. But it's the right thing to do."

"Ok. I'll do it right now."

"Thank you."

"Anything for our Moon---"

Remus shut him up with a kiss.

* * *

Whatever makes me tick

It takes away my concentration

Sets my hands trembling, gives me frustration

Breakdown, yeah. I'm gonna breakdown yeah.

I hear that two is company,

For me it's plenty trouble

Though my double thoughts are clearer

Now that I am seeing double

Breakdown, yeah

Saturday 25th March 1978

The transformation hadn't been as bad as he'd expected - maybe because nothing can ever be that bad, when you truly expect the worst. And the night itself was wonderful; he had run and run and run, until Prongs and Wormtail were lost, miles behind them, and it was just the wolf and the dog, snapping at each other playfully, goading each other on.

In the morning, once Remus had writhed and twisted back into his human body, he felt as though his bones were made of cooked spaghetti, he was so exhausted. He stumbled back to the hospital wing with Madam Pomfrey, half asleep, and was grateful to collapse into his favourite bed by the far window and sleep the whole morning away. It was blissful, to not be worrying; not fidgeting or clenching his jaw or looking for a distraction.

It was late afternoon, before Marlene finally heard about the letter.

The noise of her arguing with Madam Pomfrey woke Remus. He jolted awake, heart beating faster at the sound of raised voices. The first thing he saw was Sirius, fast asleep in the chair next to him, arms folded across his chest, head lolling, feet propped up on the edge of the hospital bedframe. There was a plate of at least twenty millionaire shortcakes on the bedside table.

Sirius's eyes snapped open a few seconds after Remus, and he blinked, surprised, and frowned.

"Is that McKinnon?!"

"LET ME SEE HIM POPPY!"

"MISS MCKINNON, I ABSOLUTELY WILL NOT HAVE THIS--"

"I KNOW HE'S HERE!"

"I SHALL CALL PROFESSOR MCGONAGALL!"

"REMUS?! REMUS LUPIN!"

"I'm here, Marlene," Remus began to get out of bed, ready to face the music. If it was all over, he'd still made it seven years. He was still legally allowed to perform magic, even if he did get exposed. "It's ok, Madam Pomfrey," he called, as Marlene came clattering across the ward, yanking back the screen which hid him.

"Is it true?!" Her hair flew about her face as she stormed in, her eyes wide and wild.

She stared at him, and Remus knew she was really seeing him, for the first time; analysing. A natural Healer, Marlene looked at the bed, and Sirius, and Remus's scars and battered frame, and he knew she was remembering every time he had been tired, or missed a lesson, or had a new

scratch. The light of truth flashed her her eyes, and she burst into tears. “You fucking bastard.”

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics are from Breakdown by The Buzzcocks.

Seventh Year: Choices

Chapter Summary

Remus has plans.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Her phobia is infection

She needs one to survive

It's her built-in protection

Without fear she'd give up and die

He's a germ free adolescent

Cleanliness is her obsession

Cleans her teeth ten times a day

Scrub away, scrub away, scrub away

The S.R. way.

“You fucking bastard!”

“Oi!” Sirius was on his feet, at once.

“It’s ok,” Remus said - not sure who he was talking to; Sirius, who had leapt into defence mode, or Marlene, sobbing and red faced and angry.

“Bastard!” She said again, defiantly, rubbing at her eyes.

“Miss McKinnon!” Madam Pomfrey appeared, looking uncharacteristically flustered, “I will have you escorted out if you cannot be civil.”

“And you!” Marlene turned on her, “You said you didn't know anything about it! You said you’d never worked with one before!”

“Don’t blame her, Marlene please...” Remus said, sitting down on the bed again, feeling a bit woozy, “She was only trying to protect me!”

“How long?!” Marlene spun around and glared at him again.

“... since I was five.”

“Bastard!”

“Marlene, please...”

She flung a piece of parchment down on the bed. It was a letter, folded up and a bit dog-eared from all the fuss. Remus reached for it with shaking hands. Marlene stood there, stone-faced, waiting for him to read it.

He unfolded it and looked down, and tried his hardest. Most of the time now, he had no trouble at all reading. But he was still very tired, and so nervous that all of a sudden he felt eleven years old again, the letters seeming to shift and change as he tried to make sense of them.

“Sorry,” he shook his head, “Sorry, I’ve got a headache, what does it... er...?”

Sirius took it from him, and in doing so, placed himself conspicuously between Remus and Marlene. He cleared his throat, frowning a bit.

“It’s from Danny McKinnon... bloody hell, Moony, what have you done?”

“Please just tell me what it says,” Remus shook his head, leaning forward and cradling his forehead in his hands. He really was getting a headache. Marlene was tapping her foot impatiently, and Madam Pomfrey was still hovering, obviously unsure whether or not to pull rank on this whole situation.

Sirius scanned the page, much more comfortable with all the attention.

“He says ‘thank you’.” He said.

“What?!” Remus looked up, squinting,

“Well, that’s the *gist* ...” Sirius replied, still reading, “...He received a letter when he arrived home this morning from one of Marlene’s friends, who ‘claims to be a werewolf’. It had a lot of useful advice, and he’d like to meet you. He says he won’t tell anybody, and he has no idea who you are anyway.”

“But I do.” Marlene said. She had stopped crying now, and her voice was a bit calmer, but Remus could feel the heat of emotion radiating from her.

“Yes.” Remus nodded, his neck stiff, “I knew you’d work it out.”

“And you sent the letter anyway?” She faltered for a moment.

“I wanted to help.” He shrugged.

There was a long pause. Remus would have liked to lie down, but felt that it wouldn’t be well received.

“Dumbledore knows? And McGonagall?” Marlene was speaking much more quietly now, as if she could hardly believe it.

“Yes.”

“It’s so dangerous.” She whispered, “You could have killed someone.”

“No.” Sirius said, hands on his hips, “It’s all been perfectly safe, ever since first year, hasn’t it, Poppy? Remus would never hurt anyone.”

“Remus wouldn’t.” Marlene met his eyes, “But the wolf might.”

“I haven’t, not ever.” Remus felt the need to confirm. “We’ve done everything possible.”

“Are you registered?” She snapped.

“Er... well *almost* everything possible.” He conceded.

“And you... you just wanted to help Danny? You weren’t trying to... I don’t know, get him on side?”

“What side are you talking about, McKinnon?!” Sirius stepped forward, threateningly, “Moony’s on *our* side. He’s your *friend* .”

“I thought he was.” Marlene replied. She wasn’t afraid of Sirius; she could best him on the quidditch pitch any day, and Madam Pomfrey was standing right there.

“I had to keep it secret, Marlene,” Remus pleaded, the tension too unbearable, “I had to, otherwise I could never have come to Hogwarts at all. You know what it’s like when there’s something... different about you. You know what *people* are like.”

He met her eye as he said this, and saw her turn cold with fear as it dawned on her exactly what he was alluding to.

“How dare you.” She said. “How *dare* you.”

“No, I didn’t mean--” He held his hands up, but it was too late.

“Stay away from my family!” She snapped, before turning on her heel and storming away, in much the same way as she had arrived.

Remus exhaled. He didn’t really feel afraid, though he had no idea what Marlene planned to do next. He wondered vaguely if he could do his NEWT exams by correspondence - or if the Potters would let him stay at theirs without James or Sirius being there. But his head was too much of a muddle to make a proper plan, and he thought he’d rather just get some sleep while he could.

He lay back down on the bed, Madam Pomfrey and Sirius watching him.

“I’m ok.” He said, “Honestly. Just going to have a little rest.”

“I’m going to speak to Professor McGonagall at once.” Madam Pomfrey said, finally.

“I think,” Remus said, sleepily, closing his eyes, “You might be better off talking to Marlene, once she’s calmed down. She respects your opinion. Don’t get her in trouble, she hasn’t done anything wrong.”

Madam Pomfrey gave him a very soft look, then, and came over to smooth his bedsheets a bit, touching his hand gently before leaving.

“Hasn’t done anything wrong.” Sirius muttered, scuffing his feet against the flagstone floor. “She’s being a bigoted little cow.”

“It’s not an uncommon point of view,” Remus sighed, “I might as well get used to it some time.”

“I ought to go and--”

“No.” Remus said, sharply, “Leave her alone.”

“But she’s going to--”

“She’s going to talk to her friends, first.” Remus said, firmly. “Lily and Mary. I’d rather she talked to them. They’re the best people in this situation.” He yawned.

“Bloody hell, Moony.” Sirius shook his head. “How can you be so calm?!”

“I’m knackered.” Remus replied. And it was the last thing he said for hours.

* * *

The thing was, whichever way it went, Remus couldn’t see much of a future for himself at Hogwarts anyway. He was grateful, obviously, for everything Dumbledore, McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey had done for him. He’d loved every one of his subjects (except Potions, maybe) and above all he had a group of friends who were dearer to him than any family would ever be. But the good things would stay good, if he had to go.

He might have more time to spend with Hope. More time to dedicate to winning this terrible war. Remus was no longer really learning anything at school that he hadn’t already got from books. He yearned for practical experience; he wanted to be *truly* tested. You didn’t need NEWTs for that, just a well stocked library and enough nerve. Remus had everything he needed now, to do the thing he had wanted to do almost all his life.

If Marlene got him dismissed from school, then Remus was finally free to seek out Greyback.

The idea had been ticking away ever since he learnt the werewolf’s name. And that night he’d written to Danny, everything seemed very clear.

It was the thing he was born to do. Almost as if he had inherited the task from Lyall.

Gawky, insignificant, second-class Remus Lupin was never going to bring down anyone so insidiously terrible and all powerful as Lord Voldemort. But the wolf in him knew he might have a chance at Fenrir Greyback. Remus knew it might kill him, but he was bloody well going to do some damage first.

He’d said nothing to Sirius about this. As far as they’d come together, Remus was deeply ashamed of his own desire for revenge; his inability to tame that reckless rage. Sirius looked to him for self control; for a reasonable, measured response, and Remus wasn’t about to shatter that illusion and risk ruining everything that worked about their dynamic.

Anyway, Remus was eighteen now, and muggle or wizard, he could make choices for himself, no matter how dangerous. And if it took upsetting Marlene to kick everything off, then at least he’d been able to help her brother in some small way. One of Matron’s fatalistic catchphrases popped into his head, then: “*no good deed goes unpunished*”. Though what good deeds Matron had ever done, he didn’t know.

It was dinner time, when he woke for the second time that day. Sirius wasn’t there any more, but the marauder’s map was tucked under Remus’s pillow. He withdrew it and saw that the marauders were all in the common room, Mary and Lily close by. There was a chicken pie on a plate by his bedside, magically kept warm somehow - Remus hadn’t worked it out yet, maybe a charm on the plate?

He decided he would eat before anything else, and did so in silence, thinking at a mile a minute, as if his brain was making up for all the time he'd wasted sleeping. He scanned the map for Marlene. She was in the girls' dorm, with Yaz.

He didn't know if that was good or bad. No angry mobs had come by brandishing pitchforks yet, which was probably a good sign. Madam Pomfrey came over just as he was finishing his second slice of millionaire shortbread. The thick oozy caramel was very comforting.

"How are you feeling, dear?" She asked, deep frown lines in her face.

"Fine!" He said, brightly. He held out the plate to her, "Want one? I'll never eat them all." This was a lie and they both knew it, but Madam Pomfrey was polite enough to go along with him.

"Well... as there's no one else on the ward today," she smiled, sitting in the chair beside him and accepting a sweet. She conjured up two saucers, then poured steaming hot tea from her wand, and it was all very pleasant, but Remus could feel a Big Talk coming on.

"I'll go, after this," he said, "Get out of your hair."

"You're never any trouble, Remus," she replied kindly, blowing on her tea to cool it. "Even when you were a little boy."

"I was a right little git, in first year." Remus countered. She smiled and shook her head,

"Not at all. A diamond in the rough."

"Oh." He said, feeling himself heat up. Anyone else he'd have told to 'shuddup' or 'piss off', but he would never, ever have a rude word to say to Madam Pomfrey.

"It's flown by, the last few years," she sighed, "I remember that little scrap of a thing you were; all eyes and elbows. You've grown into a fine young man."

He wished she'd stop, as nice as all of this was; he didn't know what to do with it. "And you deserve every success, Remus, do you hear me?" She continued, "It's not going to be easy for you, after school - and I know you know that."

He nodded.

"I'll be ok."

"You will." She smiled, her eyes brightening with tears, "And if you ever need anything, you know where to reach me."

"Of course."

"I knew Danny McKinnon, you know," She said, clearing her throat, *here it comes*, Remus thought. But she'd cunningly overpowered him with all that nice stuff, and he just had to grit his teeth and listen now.

"Yeah?" He said, casually, taking another slice of cake.

"Yes, when he was a student here. Had him in here a hundred times for patching up - he was Gryffindor Beater, like Marlene. He was a bit more outgoing than she is."

"I dunno," Remus returned, dryly, "She's hardly a shrinking violet."

Madam Pomfrey smirked, despite herself,

“No, quite. She has that McKinnon tenacity, and a keen sense of right and wrong.”

“She does.” He sighed. He’d always liked that about Marlene; her straightforwardness, “And I know what you’re going to say - that everything isn’t that simple, that there are shades of grey, and that it doesn’t matter what people *think* about you, it matters what you do...”

“Well... yes.”

“I know all that, and it’s fine. I knew all that when I wrote to Danny, I even know how Marlene would react. But in the end, it didn’t matter. The only thing that mattered was helping him.”

“I’m proud of you, Remus.”

That threw him for a loop. His throat constricted, and he almost choked trying to swallow the last of his slice, the sugar turning to acid on its way down. He spluttered and coughed, reaching for the tea to wash it down. Madam Pomfrey got up, smiling. She patted him on the shoulder as he recovered.

“I’ll let you get on.”

He took a few moments to compose himself before getting up. He brushed the crumbs from the sheets and made the bed, though he knew he didn’t really need to. The rest of the sweets he wrapped up into some parchment and carefully slid the package into his bag. He might need them, later.

Remus was almost surprised by how calm he felt. There was a sense of closing; of coming to an inevitable end. Someone was always going to find out, he told himself. He’d have been an idiot to think they could all hide such a big thing forever. They’d done a bloody good job, but it had all been luck, and they’d taken so many risks. At least this way, it had been Remus’s choice; he’d controlled it as much as he could. This way, the marauders were safe too. No one would know what they’d all been up to every full moon.

He made his way slowly back to Gryffindor Tower. He was all stiff from sleeping all day, and was grateful for the opportunity to stretch his legs in privacy. Sirius hadn’t mentioned the hip problem for a while, but Remus saw him purse his lips, or frown whenever he noticed Remus limping or rubbing his side.

“Blatherskite,” he said to the fat lady, who barely looked up from filing her fingernails to let him through.

He entered the room and felt six pairs of eyes on him at once. Steeling himself and pasting on a careless smile, he approached his friends, sitting in their usual place, taking up two sofas and an armchair.

“Moony!” Sirius got up from where he’d been sprawling to make room, “I was just going to come up and see if you were awake.”

“I’m awake,” he said redundantly, taking his seat.

“Sirius told us what you did.” Peter said, as if he couldn’t contain himself. He was fiddling with a chess piece - there was a game going on, but Remus couldn’t tell who Peter was playing.

“Good,” Remus nodded. “Er... anyone spoken to Marlene?”

"We got yelled at," Mary sighed, indicating herself and Lily. "I think she's mostly hurt that she was the last to find out."

"Mm."

"She's not said much else, though. Been locked away with Yaz."

"Right."

"Listen, Moony," James leaned over, eyes very serious, "We've been talking, and remember fifth year? Dumbledore stopped Snape from telling everyone. He can stop Marlene too, if it comes to that."

"He might." Remus nodded, though he wasn't so sure. He might serve Dumbledore better out of school now than he could have at sixteen. Especially considering the contacts Remus had already made. "But leave him out if it for now, ok?"

"Why did you *do* it?!" Peter asked, still clutching the chess piece.

"To help Danny." Remus replied, surprised. He looked at all of them, "He was alone, no one was helping him, Marlene told me that herself."

"But Remus..." Lily said, "You knew how she would feel about it. You knew she wouldn't understand."

"I knew that. But it was for Danny." Remus repeated, firmly.

They all promised to give it time, and see what Marlene decided to do next. Lily and Mary vowed that they would do everything they could, that night in their dorm, they would explain, try to convince her. Remus thanked them, because he knew how much they cared about him.

They had a quiet evening. Remus played chess with Peter and lost, then Sirius took over and they tied. James and Lily quizzed each other on potion ingredients and Mary half heartedly worked on job applications.

"Half boring muggle secretarial stuff to please mum and half boring ministry of magic stuff to please McGonagall," She sighed.

Eventually they went to bed, one by one, and though Remus had barely been awake for three hours that day, he climbed the stairs yawning. Sirius had been very patient. He hadn't said so much as a word yet, and Remus knew how difficult that must be for him. So when they were finally in bed, and as alone as they could ever be at Hogwarts, he lay quietly on his back and stares up at the velvet hangings, and let Sirius speak.

"I won't let her do this." Sirius whispered into his ear, reaching for his hand, "I'll talk to her, Mary and Lily'll talk to her, and we'll make her understand. McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey - they'll want to help you, she'll listen to them if she won't listen to her friends. Or Dumbledore. James could kick her off the team - *anything*. We won't lose you, Moony, you've worked too hard, you're not getting kicked out just for trying to be nice to that ungrateful, stuck up, intolerant..."

"It's going to be ok, Padfoot." Remus said.

"Exactly!" Sirius nodded, his hair rustling against the pillow, "Exactly, because we're going to stop her."

“No, I mean - it doesn’t matter what happens; it's going to be ok. If I leave in three months or I have to go tomorrow, everything will still be ok.”

“But your NEWTs!”

“Well I *was* looking forward to completely destroying you in History and Charms...”

“And Arithmancy, I’ve been copying off you all year.”

“And Arithmancy.” Remus laughed. “But... well the NEWTs don’t mean much. I still won’t be able to enter any of the ministry training programmes without registering as a werewolf - and I’m not going to do that, not ever. I dunno if I even really want to do that sort of job. What I *want* is to start changing things. That's why I wrote to Danny in the first place.”

“...you mean you *want* to get kicked out?!”

“I don’t think it will come to that. I don’t think Marlene would, even if she’s angry. But she might ask me to leave, and if it's what she wants, then I will.”

“And join the war.” Sirius finished. His voice sounded strange. Not bad, but Remus knew he understood.

“Yes, I suppose you could put it that way.” Remus nodded.

“I’ll come with you, then. I don’t need NEWTs either, I’m a Black.”

“I wouldn't ask you to do that.”

“I know. But I will. We’ll go together.”

Remus didn’t want to admit it, but he was quietly thrilled. Perhaps it was the Gryffindor part of him, but leaving childhood behind and rushing head first into the unknown with his best friend sounded so gloriously tempting. It would be the making of them; away from Hogwarts and schedules and all of the silly little feuds and rivalries there. They had so much to offer, he knew it. Hadn’t they triumphed in everything they’d ever attempted? Weren’t they the heroes of every story so far? It would be nothing at all to them. They could end this war and really begin their lives.

“Thank you.” He rolled over to kiss Sirius. He kissed his lips and his hands slid under his nightshirt and he kept kissing him, his lips, his neck, his jaw, “Thank you, thank you...”

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is Germ Free Adolescents by X-ray Spex

Seventh Year: What We Lack

They were wonderful promises, but it wasn't to be. Remus would not have the chance to make a mysterious and dignified early exit from Hogwarts, and Sirius would not get the opportunity to prove he would follow his Moony anywhere.

Later - after the war was over and everything else was over too - Remus would wonder whether things might have gone differently if he and Sirius had left school then. Perhaps they could have kept each other closer, or by removing themselves they could have kept other people safer.

Anyway. It didn't happen, and it did no good to dwell on.

For years and years afterwards, once the agony of all those funerals and obituaries and memorials and speeches had faded, Remus would be left with memories of his last months at Hogwarts, when they had been stupid and naive and indescribably happy without even knowing it.

Wednesday 29th March 1978

The weekend passed quietly; there was homework to complete and quidditch to train for and an enormously complicated prank to plan, and Marlene did not make a move in any direction.

Sirius and James reported that she attended quidditch practice, and played as well as she ever had, but hadn't spoken to them. Mary said she was still upset, but that she hadn't made her mind up whether or not to tell.

They were well into the next week by the time Marlene finally decided to approach Remus again. She caught him alone - which was rare, these days.

He was tidying up the Charms classroom following a revision session, just before the Wednesday 'inter-house-prank-planning-co-operative' meeting. Usually Chris helped, but he was down with a head cold, and had taken the afternoon off. Remus had half wanted to call off the group altogether. It all seemed so futile; learning and learning and learning - for what? To pass an exam, get a good mark, and then? If Greyback didn't kill him before he was twenty then he would still be unemployable. But everyone seemed to like the study groups, and he hated letting them down.

She entered the room smelling of herbs from the greenhouse - rosemary and sage and rich earthy soil. He turned, and unconsciously backed himself against a wall.

"Hello." He said.

She stood still for a while, staring at him in total silence, before replying.

"Hello. I'm furious with you."

"I know." He nodded, trying to be understanding, "I think that's fair enough. Are... um. Are you ready to talk about it?"

"No." She shot, folding her arms. She glared at him, and he averted his eyes, like a supplicant begging forgiveness. He heard her fidget a bit, and sigh impatiently. "But Danny says I have to."

Remus consciously avoided smiling, but couldn't ignore the flood of relief he felt at those words.

He looked up again, carefully.

“You’ve spoken to him properly, then?”

“Yes. He said he tried the murtlap essence combined with muggle TCP, and he’s healing faster. And you were right about taking a sleeping draught.”

“It’s the best thing, I’ve found. For healing.” Remus replied, warily, averting his eyes again. She made him feel so ashamed of himself.

“Everyone knew except me.” Marlene said. She was leaning against the opposite wall now; the whole room between them, the jumble of chairs and desks. “Even Mary.”

“She worked it out, I didn’t tell her.”

“I always thought you were weird because you were queer.”

He frowned a bit. Was he weird? He didn’t say anything, he couldn’t think of anything that would make it better.

“You really hurt my feelings, Remus.” Marlene continued, “You lied to me for years. I thought we were friends, I shared things with you I haven’t told anyone else.”

“We are friends!” Remus protested, “I’m *your* friend, anyway.”

He sighed heavily. Would it always be like this, when people found out? “Look, I couldn’t tell you; there were too many people involved... Madam Pomfrey, and even Dumbledore. I had to keep it quiet for their sakes, too. And... you’ve made it quite clear, in the past, how you feel about people like me.”

“You should have *told* me.”

“What would you have done?” Remus was getting annoyed now. “Complained? Told everyone? Got me expelled?”

“I might not have.” She bit her lip and looked away. The less certain she was, the more angry Remus grew.

“Well I didn’t much fancy taking the risk!” He said, “I haven’t got a family, or a real home to go to, in case you’d forgotten. I haven’t got *anything* going for me outside of this school, so forgive me for doing everything I could to stay.”

“I understand that,” She looked up, quickly, reaching her hands out, “--and I’d never want to cause you any trouble, but *Remus* , can’t you see how dangerous--”

“I was eleven! I was only a kid, and this old man shows up and tells me I’m going to magic school - what would *you* have done?!”

“Don’t shout at me!” She frowned, shrinking a bit. “I didn’t come to shout.”

“Sorry.” He muttered. “I didn’t get my chance the other day.”

“I’m sorry about that.”

“Good.”

They were quiet after that, both looking at the ground, both fidgeting with their hands. Remus could hear Marlene's heart thudding in a steady, anxious rhythm.

"Look." He said, keeping his voice low and steady, unclenching his fists. "If you want me to leave Hogwarts, then I will. As long as you *promise* not to get anyone else in trouble, I'm not going to put up a fight."

"But your NEWTs..."

"They won't matter if you're going to tell everyone how dangerous I am."

"You sound like Danny."

Quiet again. Remus shook his head, tired and exasperated. He tried a different tack.

"How is he, now? The letter said he wanted to meet me?"

"He's ok." She nodded, her eyes a bit bright. "I think it cheered him up, knowing that someone else was going through the same thing."

"Yeah," Remus nodded, "It's something I would have liked. James and Sirius and Pete... they've always made sure I never felt alone. So I know how much of a difference it makes."

Marlene nodded and wiped her eyes.

"I'm angry." She said, tiredly. "But I don't know if I'm angry with you. You just... it was such a shock, and I'm not sure how many more shocks I can take, these days."

He laughed, and didn't really know why.

She smiled, weakly. "I'm not going to say anything. I don't want you to go anywhere. Danny says... he says we need to focus on our similarities, not our differences. Now more than ever. Lily and Mary said the same. I know they're right, it's just harder than I expected."

"I can't have you hating me." He said, warily.

"I don't hate *you*."

"Hating what I am is the same thing."

"I'm trying, Remus." She blinked away tears. "I swear, I'll try."

"Thank you." He nodded.

For a split second he was disappointed; he'd been so ready for a change. Knowing he'd have to wait a bit longer stung for a moment, but dissipated quickly, like a door closing. That was that. He would finish school and beat everyone in History - Arithmancy too, probably - and watch the final quidditch game, and get too drunk celebrating with his friends. Greyback would wait.

"Can I help you with this?" Marlene gestured at the messy classroom. "Potter and Black and their gang of miscreants will be here in a minute to plan their raid on Slytherin..."

"Yeah, ok," Remus nodded, and they both began moving the desks. The confrontation seemed to be over, and for now they were both satisfied. He was glad; it had been awful not having Marlene as a friend.

Remus and Chris usually used magic to move the classroom furniture back, but Marlene had never been good at locomotion spells, so she just started lifting and pushing things. Remus didn't want to show off now that they were back on tentative talking terms, so he did his best to match her.

"I'm going to talk to Mary." Marlene said, suddenly, lifting a chair and pushing it under a desk. "Yaz wants me to. I told Danny already."

"That's good." Remus smiled, encouragingly. "I'm sure Mary will be fine. She's the least judgmental person I know."

"Yeah you're probably right." Marlene watched him, thoughtfully as he moved the final table back into place. "Remus?"

"Hm?"

"Is your limp because of the transformations?"

"Am I limping?" Remus stood a bit straighter, self conscious.

"Sometimes more than others," she replied, matter of factly. "I always thought... with your upbringing. Someone did it to you."

He shook his head.

"When I was thirteen or so, I think something clicked back into place a bit wonky." He shrugged. "Gets a bit stiff now and then. I hardly think about it now."

"Mmm." She replied, looking thoughtful.

"-- *How many times ?!*"

The door flew open and Lily entered, looking furious, James trailing behind her, Peter and Sirius close behind, both smirking. "We said *no pranks* until the end of term! We're supposed to be keeping a low profile, you're *Head Boy* !"

"C'mon, Evans," James said, hands out, "That was nothing, barely even a prank, it was... er..." he cast a pleading glance at Sirius,

"High spirits!" Sirius supplied.

"High spirits!" James nodded, grinning.

"All of the bathroom mirrors suddenly reflecting back *troll faces* is high spirits?!" Lily rounded on them both.

It was no good, all three boys collapsed into peals of laughter.

Remus sniggered too; he'd done half the research for that one. The week before he'd spent hours searching through books of troll dynasty histories for portraits to get all the features right. He hoped he'd get a chance to catch some of the reactions before Flitwick managed to break the glamour spell they'd used.

"You nutters." Marlene smiled shyly.

"Marlene!" Lily gasped.

They all turned to look at her, and then to Remus, agape. He made a point of smiling back at them all, relaxing his shoulders and clapping his hands together.

“Come on then! This co-operative isn’t going to run itself...”

* * *

Sirius still had some opinions about Marlene, of course. Remus refused to hear them. He wanted the matter closed, he wanted to move on. And he wanted to meet Danny, as soon as he possibly could. For the first time, for better or for worse, Remus felt he had an ally out there. Someone who was like him, on their side. He wrote another letter, then scrapped it and tried again. Then again, and again. There was so much to say Remus wasn’t sure where to start.

“What do you want to talk to him for, though?” Sirius yawned one night in bed, as Remus gave up on another attempt to properly introduce himself. “You know more about being a werewolf than he does, it’s not as if he’ll have any special insight.”

“It’s not really about that.” Remus yawned back, putting out his wand light and lying down. He rubbed the knuckles and fingers on his right hand. Some days he felt as if he never put his quill down; he was always writing, if not feverishly revising his notes for NEWTs, then making complex calculations in aid of the big prank, or writing to Grant or Ferox or Danny.

“Wait until school’s finished, then.” Sirius advised. “Safer for both of you.”

“There are three moons between now and then.” Remus replied, trying to get comfortable. The sheets always ended up wrinkled in Sirius’s bed, he had no idea how the other boy managed it.

“I know that,” Sirius replied, indignantly. “But there’s not much you can do, is there?”

“S’pose not.”

“And you don’t owe him anything.”

“No.” Remus chose his words carefully. “But I owe it to myself to do the right thing, don’t I?”

“Is that what got into your head?” Sirius was frowning, Remus could tell.

A flutter in his belly told him they were heading for a fight, and he could avert it right now by just changing the subject.

“What do you mean, ‘what got into my head’?!” Remus snapped.

“When you wrote to Danny in the first place. You’ve got to admit it was a bit reckless.”

“Excuse me?!”

“Well for someone who’s spent seven years trying to keep every aspect of himself completely private, it was a bit bonkers to just go and send a letter to a stranger--”

“--my friend’s *brother*-- ”

“--spilling your guts about *everything*-- ”

“Not everything!”

“--but if it was all in the service of doing the right thing, then I suppose that’s *fine* .”

“Look, if you’re pissed off with me then just say so, this sarcastic crap doesn’t suit you, Black.”
Remus rolled over onto his side.

“I’m not pissed off.” Sirius said.

“Good.”

Remus knew that wasn’t the end of it. He waited, practically champing at the bit.

“...I’ve just been thinking, that’s all.” Sirius said, finally. Remus smirked to himself, before rolling back over, frowning,

“What?”

“It’s like you wanted to leave, or something.”

“Obviously I wanted to leave,” Remus hissed, going in, “I told you. It’s pointless, me doing NEWTs, pissing about with silly exams and clubs and pranks, when things are happening out there, *right now*. I had a chance to help, and I took it. So what if I didn’t care about the consequences?! Calling me reckless?! I thought *you’d* understand! What happened to wanting to get back at your family? What happened to wanting to put a stop to it?”

“I do want to...” Sirius said, sounding smaller.

“Well you’re not acting like it. You seem more fussed about that stupid quidditch match than the war. Maybe they’re the same thing to you.”

“Merlin!” Sirius replied, weakly, “You don’t stop until you’ve tasted blood, do you?”

“Must be the wolf in me.” Remus said, shortly.

He rolled over again and shut his eyes.

Seventh Year: Superego

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Oh mine eyes have seen the glory of the theories of Freud,

He has taught me all the evils that my ego must avoid.

Repression of the impulses results in paranoid

As the id goes marching on.

Saturday 1st April 1978

“Wotcher!”

“Hello.”

“Gawd, cheer up a bit, sunshine! After I went to all that effort to book a bloody audience wiv’ ya!”

“Sorry! I’m really, really happy to hear from you.”

“Christ, you get posher by the day.”

Remus laughed, despite himself. The sound echoed back through the receiver, and made him think about Grant’s voice travelling all the way through the telephone wire, from the very bottom of England, up through to him in the Scottish Highlands. Muggles were pretty magic too, really.

“How are you?” He asked, “Still enjoying the seaside?”

“Winter was fucking dire.” Grant replied, settling into the conversation. Remus could hear the cigarette between his teeth, the *grind-click* of a zippo lighter. He longed to see the other boy, to see his face and watch his expressions. “Rain. Freezing cold wind - it comes in off the sea, rattles the windows worse than at St Eddy’s. Mind you, the students made up for it.”

“Students?”

“At the Art College, and Brighton Poly. You get loads of our sort, at art schools. I was seeing an engineer, a poet and a painter.”

“Is that three separate people, or one very clever person?” Remus asked, wryly.

“Cheeky beggar. Wouldn’t you like to know.” Grant snickered. “What about you, anyway? How’s lover boy?”

Remus snorted derisively.

“Fine.”

“Fine?”

“Fine.”

Grant exhaled loudly.

“Lord, not another fight, is it? Tell you what, sweetheart, you want to get on top of these moods of yours.”

“What moods?!” Remus frowned. Grant laughed,

“You’re the moodiest bloke I know, worse than a girl on the blob when something’s pissed you off. And you ‘aven’t half got a mouth on ya. I’ve ‘ad broken ribs hurt less than some things you’ve said.”

“You never said...”

“No, well, I let you get away with it because it’s easier than picking a fight. ‘sides, it’s not your fault. I’m the same, in’t I? We all are, institutionalised kids.”

“Institutionalised?!”

It was an enormous word coming from Grant, but it felt rude to say so. *God*, Remus thought to himself, *when did I become such a snob?*

“Yep, ‘pparently that’s what we are. The poet told me - ‘e was doing a course in psychology. Said I’m afraid to stay with one person too long ‘cos I was abandoned too much when I was small. Dumped him after that, obviously.”

“I’ve been with Sirius for ages.” Remus replied, defensively. “It’s only ever been him.”

“Got the same problem, though.” Grant mused, as though they were just passing the time of day, “When was the last time you let anyone be nice to you without saying something ‘orrible back?”

Remus pressed his lips together.

“I don’t do that.” He said, though he already knew Grant was right. Bastard.

“If you say so.” Grant returned, casually. “How’s everything else, anyway?”

“I met my mother.”

“Crikey.”

“Yeah. She’s ok.”

“That what’s got you all moody?”

“No. Maybe.”

“Wouldn’t blame you if it was. I lose it for weeks after I see mine. Loves telling me how much she hates me.” He always sounded as if he was smiling, even as he said this. It made it more unpleasant somehow.

“Well. Mine didn’t say that.” Remus said. “Actually, she said she loves me.”

“That’s nice, then.”

“Yeah.”

“You don’t have to say it back, y’know. She dumped you, the callous cow, she’s got no right to expect it.”

Remus reeled back a little at that, shocked.

“She had her reasons. Anyway, it’s not like I don’t feel anything for her. It’s just hard to say. S’pose your psychologist friend would think that’s down to me being ‘institutionalised’.”

“S’pose so.”

“But you never had a problem. With, er... affection.”

Grant laughed again, a joyful cackle.

“If you don’t reckon shagging every lad who looks at me sideways is a problem.”

“I just meant you’re more *open* ...”

Remus couldn’t go on, Grant’s laughter was drowning everything out.

“Sorry!” He wheezed, “Gawd, I forgot how funny you were.”

“I thought I was moody.”

“You’re a complicated man, Remus bloody Lupin. S’why I love you.”

Remus groaned. Grant laughed again. “Don’t worry, not in a queer way.”

That made Remus laugh, and for a good few minutes after that laughter was all that passed between them, through miles and miles of telephone wire.

* * *

Remus walked back to Hogsmeade with a lighter step than he’d had an hour before. Just talking to someone outside of Hogwarts, someone outside of the war, was a wonderful relief.

(“I wish there was a phone at school I could use,” he’d said, apologetically, “I’d call you all the time.”

“When we’re eccentric millionaires,” Grant mused, “We can pay someone to carry a phone around for us, everywhere we go. The engineer said they’ll be able to do that, maybe by the eighties.”

“I don’t see how that would work,” Remus frowned, “Where would you plug it in?”

“You’re the one at the posh school, you tell me.”)

He’d promised to meet the others in The Three Broomsticks after the phone call, which had taken weeks to plan. Sirius hadn’t said anything when Remus headed towards the phone box outside of town - maybe a few weeks ago he’d have offered to walk with him, but they still weren’t being nice to each other. They weren’t being nasty, but they weren’t happy. It was tiring, but giving ground seemed like even harder work.

Remus took a moment for himself before entering the pub. He smoked, leaning against the wall under the signpost. It was a bright spring day, and the first weekend he’d had in ages which wasn’t

organised within an inch of its life. He watched the busy high street, happy students walking this way and that with their friends, shopping bags bulging and faces beaming. How different was he, from them? Was he any less?

Not to his friends, he thought, confidently. Not to Sirius.

Suddenly, he caught a familiar scent on the wind, and he searched the crowd quickly to find Chris, hurrying past.

“Oi! Oi, Christopher!” Remus called to him.

The mousy boy stopped, saw who was shouting, then came over - a bit reluctantly.

“Hello, Remus,” he nodded, looking agitated. He didn’t have his usual bag of books, and his clothes were smarter than usual. He smelled slightly different too - a new soap, or... it couldn’t be cologne?!

“Hiya, not seen you in ages,” Remus smiled down at him.

“Yeah, been so busy... then I had that cold, remember?” Christopher didn’t quite meet his eyes. He was blushing; but Christopher was always blushing, so Remus didn’t put much stock in it.

“Oh yeah, feeling better?”

“Yes, thanks.

“Come in, the others are all inside...”

“Oh... no, sorry, Remus, um. I’m meeting someone...”

“Oh!” Remus looked him up and down again. Well now it made a bit more sense. “Who?”

“Erm. Not anyone you know... sorry, but... do you mind? I’m going to be late.”

“Course! Sorry...” Remus said, a little bit annoyed. Christopher had never brushed him off like that before. He watched him hurry off down the street and turn a corner.

Fine.

Remus stubbed out his cigarette in the pot of red geraniums on the doorstep of the pub, then pushed the door open and entered. James, Lily, Mary, Peter, Marlene and Yaz were sitting in a booth in the far corner, the table laden with empty glasses.

He smiled walking over to them, ducking his head under the low black ceiling beams and raising a hand in greeting.

“Moony!” James grinned, waving back. Peter and Mary moved along on the plush green velvet seat to make room for him.

“How was your phone call?” Lily asked, brightly.

“Good, thanks.” Remus nodded. “What have you lot been up to?”

“Planning the end of year party.” Mary smiled eagerly.

“My folks said they’ll host.” James said. “We’ll invite the whole year. Most of them, anyway...”

“Sounds great.” Remus grinned back.

Things had been awkward between all of them, because it was painfully obvious that he and Sirius were fighting. Lily tried to be practical and act as if she was above it all, but James was perpetually caught between them, and never knew where to look.

“Right, come and get them...!” Sirius suddenly appeared over James’s shoulder from the bar, a tray of pints in his arms. He looked up and saw Remus, and the smile died on his lips.

Everyone looked away, embarrassed, and Remus felt something harden in his chest. A stream of scathing one-liners flashed up in his mind; spiteful, sharp things. It took an enormous effort to push them down. He didn’t want it to be easier to be cruel than kind. He refused to be that kind of person. St Edmund’s couldn’t be all he ever was.

“Hiya,” he smiled, lowering his head so that his hair fell into his eyes and he had to push the curls back. He was such a mess, he ought to get it cut.

“Hi.” Sirius set the tray down with a clank. “I’ll go back and get you--”

“Remus can have mine,” Mary said, getting out of the booth, “Samuel from my Charms group has been throwing me looks all afternoon... have my seat, Black.” She nudged him into the seat, and Sirius gingerly took his place beside Remus.

“See you later!” Mary trilled, sashaying across the pub floor to a group of Ravenclaw boys.

Marlene grinned and shook her head at Yaz, who laughed and squeezed her hand on top of the table. Remus’s heart skipped and he glanced around furtively.

No one else was looking - their little booth was in an awkward corner of the room, away from the windows and poorly lit by gaslights. No doubt the privacy was why they’d chosen it, Remus saw now that all of his friends were rosy cheeked and glassy eyed from beer. Lily was practically sitting in James’s lap, and his right hand had vanished up the back of her jumper.

“How was the call?” Sirius asked, neutrally, looking down at his beer.

“Good.” Remus replied quietly, “He sounded really well. Happy.”

“That’s nice.”

Remus took a deep swig of beer for courage. Peter was talking quidditch with Marlene and Yaz, James and Lily only had eyes for each other. He turned to Sirius, twisting sideways in the seat,

“I’m such a prick.” He said.

“Yep.” Sirius drank too, still not really looking at Remus, though the corner of his lips turned up as he tilted his head back.

The flash of white skin on his neck as he swallowed caught Remus’s attention. He budged up on the seat, closer to Sirius.

“I’m sorry.” He whispered, so that only Sirius could hear him.

“I can’t talk to you about anything sometimes without you biting my head off.” Sirius grumbled.

“You get into these moods and I can’t reach you.”

“I know...” Remus said, trying not to get too sidetracked by the way Sirius’s adam’s apple bobbed,

or the way his pulse fluttered in that hollow above his collar bone, or his lovely slender wrists, and how he'd love to hold them fast and...

Remus looked around once more, just in case, before leaning in even closer, pushing Sirius's hair back with his fingers and kissing that beautiful neck, flicking his tongue up, just behind his earlobe. He heard Sirius's sharp intake of breath, and the blood rushing so fast in his veins it sounded like fizzing, and Remus's own temperature began to rise.

"I'm really sorry," he said again, "It's my fault, and I'll do better."

"Better?" Sirius muttered, his head bowed so that his hair fell over his face.

"Better. I'm sorry. I lose my temper when people tell me what to do, but I'm going to try."

Sirius's head inclined towards him, and Remus pulled away so that they could look each other in the eye. He wasn't angry, or guarded anymore, which was a relief.

"S'pose it's not really my job to tell you what to do in the first place..." Sirius said, giving way so easily. He couldn't hold grudges, except maybe for his family. He was too good, inside and out. Remus felt another pang of guilt at that, and it fortified his resolve. He would do everything to change; to deserve Sirius's blind loyalty.

"No, but I don't have to be such a dick about it," Remus countered, moving back a bit more and reaching for his drink. "I'll make it up to you, I promise."

"Oh yeah?" Sirius cocked an eyebrow. All things forgiven, his mind had clearly returned to its usual preoccupation.

"Later." Remus returned, imperiously, giving him a light slap on the thigh.

"So what did Grant say?" Sirius settled back comfortably into the corner of the booth. The uncomfortable part over, his posture relaxed, he rested a boot against the nearest free stool, leaning forward on his knee.

"Oh, we just caught up," Remus said, swilling his beer lightly, "He's still working in Brighton, has his own flat; wants to get a car for weekends."

"We could go there, after school's finished." Sirius suggested, "If you wanted? If there's time for a holiday."

"Maybe," Remus nodded, drinking again. None of them knew what would happen when school ended; not really. Even James and Lily were hazy on the details.

"--so I told him I'd hex his bollocks off if he asked me one more time." Yaz was just saying, Marlene giggling and hiding her face in her hands,

"You're awful!"

"Well he needs to learn his lesson!"

"Who?" James and Sirius both asked, neither one of them wanting to be left out of any gossip.

"Ugh, Lockhart," Yaz tossed her head haughtily, her ponytail swinging.

"Is he bothering you lot again?" James frowned, "I told him to stay away from my team! I'll tell Flitwick--"

“Don’t worry, he got the message this time,” Marlene laughed, “Yaz is convincing.”

“What does he want?” Sirius asked.

“He just keeps sniffing around, trying to find out what we’re up to.” James sighed, shaking his head, “Reckons he’s being left out. He’s like a more hygiene conscious version of Snape in fifth year.”

Lily elbowed him in the ribs, which only made James laugh.

“Left out of what?” Remus frowned, “He doesn’t even play, and he’s a Ravenclaw - they lost the last game.”

“Moony!” Sirius exclaimed, “Did you just demonstrate quidditch knowledge?!”

Everybody laughed at him, and Remus mock-sulked, drinking more beer.

“Hard to avoid it in our bloody dorm.” He retorted.

“Anyway, it’s not the quidditch team he’s interested in.” James shook his head, grinning, “It’s *the other thing* .” He said this very ominously, eyebrows knit together and casting suspicious looks around the pub. Ah, Remus thought; the prank.

“He hasn’t asked me,” Remus said, with a shrug.

“That’s because you’ve got everyone fooled,” Marlene replied. “The whole school somehow thinks you’re the mild one out of this lot.”

Remus smiled at her very sweetly.

“Are you suggesting I’m not?” He raised an eyebrow, grinning at her.

Beside him, Sirius made a small strained noise in the back of his throat. His pulse still hadn’t quite settled down yet.

“Right,” Lily stood up, draining her drink and wiping her lips on the back of her sleeve, “We’ve got two hours before I’ve got to start herding the prefects back, and I need to go to Scrivenshaft’s before it closes. Potter?”

“Yep, coming,” James necked the dregs of his own pint.

“We both need broom polish, if you want to come, Pete?” Marlene said, kindly. Wormtail had been left out of a lot, lately; even Dorcas was ignoring him.

“Great!” He stood up eagerly, following James out of the booth.

“Black?” Marlene looked at Sirius. “Didn’t you want new gloves?”

“I’ll order them from Quidditch Monthly.” He replied, barely looking up at her.

“Suit yourself,” she shrugged. There was a bit of commotion as they all got their things together and settled the bill, but finally Remus and Sirius were left alone. Remus turned to him slowly, trying to look innocent.

“What do you fancy doing, then? Walk? Honeyduke’s?”

“When the dorm room is guaranteed to be empty for at least two hours?!” Sirius licked his lips.

“More like an hour and a half, by the time we get up there...”

“Better get a move on then.”

“Oi,” Remus smirked, standing up, hands in his pockets. “I thought I told you I don’t like being told what to do.”

They walked out of the pub single file, and Remus held the door open. As Sirius edged past him, shuffling sideways, he leaned forward subtly and whispered,

“You’ll just have to tell *me* what to do, then.”

Remus grinned.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Psychotherapy' by Melanie.

Weird British words dictionary:

Brighton Poly - Brighton Polytechnic (Now the University of Brighton). Polys were higher education centres which focused on the sciences, engineering and other vocational subjects. They couldn't offer degrees, and were seen as 'second-rate' universities. The majority of Polytechnics became Universities under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

'Girl on the blob' - 'blob' is UK slang for a period/menstruation.

Seventh Year: Night and Day

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

God save the queen.

The fascist regime.

They made you a moron;

A potential H bomb.

God save the queen.

She ain't no human being

And there's no future

And England's dreaming...

Friday 28th April 1978

“Remus... Remus. Fuck's sake, wake up...”

“Piss off.” Remus grumbled, shaken awake. “S'the middle of the night.”

“You're grinding your teeth again.” Sirius complained.

“I can't help it. Go to sleep.”

“Between your gnashing and Prongs' snoring and Wormtail getting up every five minutes, how can I?!”

“Oi!” A voice came from across the room, “I have a nervous bladder!”

“You shouldn't drink so much before bed!” Sirius hissed back.

“Sor- ry , *mother* .” Peter retorted, grumpily, “I didn't realise you were monitoring my biology.”

“You trip over your dirty laundry every time you get up!”

“Actually, it was Moony's books!”

“Not mine!” Remus called, “For the prank!”

“All of you, shut up!” James yelled.

They were quiet, for a minute.

“Bloody Wormtail.” Sirius muttered into his pillow, rolling over.

“Great, now I need the loo...” Remus grumbled, getting out of bed, his bare feet hitting the cold floorboards.

He didn’t turn the light on in the bathroom, in an attempt to stay semi-asleep, but it was no good. By the time he’d got up, crossed the room, peed and washed his hands, Remus was fully awake. And his jaw hurt, so Sirius must have been right about the grinding. It was for the same reason Peter had been up and down all night, and probably the same reason Sirius couldn’t sleep. NEWTs started next week.

As he exited the little bathroom, Peter rushed forward to go in again, reaching for the panel of light switches on the wall as he did, and hitting the wrong one. Remus winced, feeling as if his retinas had blown out as startling artificial brightness filled the room.

“Wormtail you prick!” Sirius growled from the bed. Remus had left the curtains part way open, and the light struck across his face like a laser beam.

“Sorry, sorry!” Peter said, hopping from foot to foot as he fumbled with the switches on the wall, “I didn’t mean to get that one...”

“I can’t wait until I don’t have to share a room with you any more, you little rodent,” Sirius spat, sitting up, “Don’t you ever think about anyone else?!”

“Shut up, dickhead,” Peter replied, sounding sleepy and upset, “Think I like sharing with you and Moony?!”

“What *about* me and Moony?!” Sirius sat up, sharply.

“Just go to the loo, Peter,” Remus sighed, flicking on the bathroom light and then flicking off the big overhead bedroom light, so that they were cast into darkness once more. Peter slammed the door and locked it.

“Silly little sod...” Sirius grumbled to himself.

“Sirius!” Remus snapped, in that authoritative voice that always worked, “Stop whining.”

Sirius pressed his lips together, falling instantly quiet, eyes trained on Remus.

“Good boy,” Remus smirked. He rubbed the back of his head, glancing at the clock on Peter’s bedside table. Half past three. “I’m going downstairs, I won’t be able to sleep now.” He said. “And you can have some peace.”

They’d been sharing Remus’s bed for the past few nights now, and though it was large, it wasn’t really meant for two fully grown boys. Unfortunately they no longer had a choice, since Sirius’s own bed had disappeared earlier that week. They’d been practicing for the prank, and hit a bit of a snag with the main incantation. Sirius remained cheerfully optimistic that it would show up again eventually, but Remus was less sure.

He went quietly down the stairs, book under his arm.

Remus loved the common room when it was empty; it was filled with some of his very happiest memories of Hogwarts.

He went over and opened the big bay window. He was always too warm, and forever getting yelled

at for opening windows to let cold air in - but no one was around to complain. Remus inhaled the scent of the forest, and the castle; the night sky and the snow from the mountains; the velvety smooth water of the lake and every blade of grass on the quidditch pitch. Hogwarts. He wondered if he would ever feel so at home anywhere ever again.

Remus shook his head, realising how silly and sentimental he was being. He left the windows wide and turned back into the room, settling down on the big velvet couch and opening his book. He flicked his wand at the kettle hanging over the fire, and it began to heat up. He flicked through his book at his tea brewed, trying to find his place.

Where would he get his books, after Hogwarts? It was easy enough to join a muggle library - but did wizards have them too? Another question for Sirius - or maybe Chris, when Remus saw him next. Christopher had been very elusive since they'd bumped into each other in Hogsmeade.

Just as the kettle boiled, Remus's ears pricked at the sound of familiar footsteps descending the dormitory staircase. He smiled a secret smile to himself, and without turning around, simply summoned a second teacup from the cabinet, getting ready to pour.

"Thought you wanted to sleep?" He said, mildly, as Sirius padded across the carpet wrapped in his bed blanket, and sat in the warm spot Remus had left on the couch.

"Prongs' snoring still." Sirius yawned, pulling the blanket tighter as Remus brought over the tea. "Bloody hell, it's freezing down here."

"I'll shut the window--"

"No, it's ok. I'll warm up."

Remus sat down with his tea, muttering; "*Levio liber*", at his book, so that he could read it with his tea in one hand and an arm around Sirius, who leaned sleepily against his shoulder. *Will it be like this? Remus wondered, after Hogwarts? Nights on the couch with no one bothering us.*

"What you reading?" Sirius asked, watching the heavy book levitating just above Remus's lap.

"Oh, something I found on legilimency."

"Eh?" Sirius raised his head, a small frown forming. "Why?"

"Just interested." Remus replied. "Wanted to read something outside of my NEWT core texts, and I thought - mind reading; cool. Who wouldn't want to?"

"I think it ought to be illegal." Sirius said, suddenly prickly, though Remus didn't know why. "It's an invasion of privacy - practically a dark art."

"Well, I'm only reading about it." Remus said, carefully.

"I didn't mean *you* would..." Sirius sighed, settling back down. Seeing it had upset Sirius, Remus allowed the book to set itself down, and stroked his hair, gently, because he always liked it, even if he pretended he didn't. He felt Sirius relax against him again, before saying in an odd voice; "Sorry, I didn't mean to snap. It's just that my mother can do it. She's a legilimens."

"Oh..."

"So she could find out what we were up to - where our 'loyalties lay'."

"I'm sorry, Padfoot." Remus squeezed his arm. That protective feeling came back, cold and sweet like adrenaline.

"Don't be. I'm well shot of her, mad old bat. And I'd sort of learnt to deflect it, by the end. Made her so angry." He let out a hollow chuckle.

"You learnt occlumency?" Remus raised his eyebrows, "That's incredible!"

"Not exactly..." Sirius frowned again, but this time Remus knew it was because he was thinking very hard. He sat up, pulling away from Remus, and leaned over to set his tea down on the coffee table,

"It's more like... you just learn not to think the things she wants you to think. It got worse when we were teenagers, you know, she was worried about 'impure thoughts'. *Tojourns pur*. So I'd just... distract her by thinking something else."

"So she wouldn't find out about Mary?" Remus asked, "Or the other muggle born girls?"

"Um." Sirius fidgeted with his hands, looking away, "Yeah, that. And... well, whatever, anything I didn't want her to know. Trouble is, you end up confusing yourself. It's like tying your own thoughts up in knots. Hard to unpick... 'fraid you used to get the raw end of that, a bit."

He met Remus's eyes then, and he looked so ashamed and sorry, that Remus realised exactly what he meant. Was that why it had all been so difficult, in the beginning? Why Sirius had been so insistent on pretending nothing was going on between them?

Remus put down his own tea and hugged Sirius tightly. He hated her. He hated the war, and he hated himself for not being able to say the right words. This was one of those times it might have really mattered, too.

"Sirius..." he said, heart pounding as they released each other finally, "I'm so..."

"It's fine, Moony. It's over now." Sirius smiled at him bravely.

"I know, but I want you to know, I want to *tell* you... I really really... I..."

"I know." Sirius kissed him gently, wrapping his arms around him once more and squeezing him back. "Me too."

* * *

Well we got no choice

All the girls and boys

Makin' all that noise

'Cause they found new toys

Well we can't salute ya can't find a flag

If that don't suit ya that's a drag.

Friday 5th May 1978

"I failed." Marlene whispered as they left the exam hall, wringing her hands together.

"You did not." Mary slung her arm around her friend's shoulder.

"At least it's over." Marlene sighed.

"Don't, you're making me all emotional." Mary laughed. "How about you, Lupin?" She reached out to link her arm with his as the three of them walked down the corridor towards the grounds.

"Am I emotional?" He asked, raising an eyebrow.

"How do you think you *did*?" Mary clarified, "I know you're stoic."

"Ok, I think. The question on basilisks threw me a bit, but I think I managed."

"Stoic and modest, my dream man." Mary sighed.

"I have to go," Marlene said, as they turned a corner, "Sorry, I said I'd meet--"

"Yasmin." Mary finished for her, a bit cattily. She let Marlene out from under her arm. "Off you, pop, then."

"Moody cow," Marlene poked her tongue out, "You know I love you forever."

"Back at you," Mary scrunched up her nose. "See you at dinner."

"Bye, Marlene," Remus said, politely. They were friends again, but it still felt weird.

"See you!"

Mary kept her grip on Remus's arm, and looked up at him,

"You're not about to abandon me for a raven-haired quidditch player too, are you?" She asked, "Honestly, it's like a club you're all in."

"Oh shut up," he laughed, "And no. He's got his Muggle Studies exam."

"So you're mine?!"

"All yours." He nodded. She grinned and kissed his cheek. They kept walking, heading for the sunshine.

"I think I mucked up the bit on cockatrices," Mary mused, "I couldn't ever take them seriously enough to study - I mean for god's sake, half-dragon, half-chicken?! Fucking nonsense. Still, I reckon I passed ok."

"I'm sure you did," Remus said, "You worked hard - we all did."

"Worked harder when Ferox was teaching," Mary grinned.

"God, me too," Remus replied casually, causing Mary to burst into giggles. He liked shocking her; it was hard to do, most of the time. Mind you, she took everything in her stride. No sooner had they turned the last corner than she stopped in her tracks, a look of distaste crossing her face.

"Ugh, it's Rotherhide."

Remus followed her line of vision. They were just at the final archway which led out into the grounds. It was a sunny day, if a little bit cool, and after a rainy start to the year every student not in lessons or exams was out enjoying the weather. Roman Rotherhide, the seventh year Ravenclaw heartthrob, was loitering with a few of his friends just ahead. He and Mary had been on and off for years, and judging by the look on her face, they were most definitely 'off' now.

"What's he done?" Remus asked.

"Nothing, he just annoys me." She said. "Some days all of them do."

"Boys?"

"Wizards."

"Fair enough. Come on, let's just keep walking."

"Snog me!" Mary turned to him, "Go on, it'll drive him mad. Quick, he's looking!"

"Mary!" Remus laughed, veering away from her, "No!"

"Please!"

"No!"

"Ugh, some friend you are," she grumbled. "Come on, then..."

"You're mental." Remus shook his head, following her. He sighed and slipped his hand in hers.

"There, will that do?"

"My hero," she grinned up at him, squeezing his hand back, swinging it back and forth so that Roman was sure to notice.

They settled underneath a large beech tree near the lake. Remus lay on his back with his arms behind his head, watching the boughs creak slowly above, while Mary began to file and paint her fingernails.

Sirius had made Remus promise not to start revising for anything else once his Care of Magical Creatures exam was finished, and for once Remus didn't argue. He was right in the sweet spot between full moons where he felt the most healthy and human - plus, lessons were finished forever, which meant he had no homework, and everyone was in a good mood lately - why lock himself away in the library?

"God, I can't wait for it all to be over." Mary said, "I'll miss all of you, obviously, but I'm *done* with school."

"Do you know what you're doing after?" Remus asked, closing his eyes and staring at the bright red veins of his eyelids.

"Mum wants me to do a typing course, get a 'proper job'."

"You could if you wanted," Remus mused, "You could charm a typewriter, easy."

"Ha, I ought to. That'd show mum. Anyway, I'll probably get myself up the duff and have to get married by the time I'm nineteen, like she did. Then it's cooking, laundry and church for the rest of my life."

“What a cheerful thought.” Remus snorted.

“Lily said you lot were going to help Dumbledore.” Mary said, suddenly.

Remus opened his eyes and turned his head, squinting up at her. She was wearing a pair of white framed cat-eye sunglasses, so he couldn’t see her eyes, but her mouth was serious, no longer chirpy.

“That’s right.” He said.

“So... what? You’re all going finish school and go and save the world?”

“Well.” Remus said, steadily, “We’ll start by winning the war, anyway.”

“Remus, please don’t.”

He sat up, then, annoyed.

“Why are you bringing this up?”

“Because Lily’s lost all sense of reason since she’s been with Potter. Potter and Black think they’re untouchable anyway and Peter can’t think for himself. You’re the sensible one.”

“No I’m not.”

“I just... I think about the attacks at Christmas. Marlene’s brother. The way people are looking at each other these days. I’m frightened. It’s going to get worse.”

“Yes, it is.” He said, his voice hard. “Unless someone stops it.”

“But why does it have to be you? Any of you?! Let Dumbledore fight, if he’s so powerful as everyone says. Why does he need kids to help him?”

“We’re not *kids* . Mary, this isn’t about Dumbledore, or even Voldemort, it’s... it’s about the whole wizarding world. The community; making it a place where we can all--”

“Remus, you’re never going to *be* one of them.”

“Excuse me?”

“Look. Do you know why my family ended up in the UK? My grandad fought in the war. He got medals and all that crap, ‘the gratitude of the empire’. They said they couldn’t have beat Hitler without the soldiers of the commonwealth. You want to know what happened to that gratitude when the war was over? When he moved here for a better life? Do you know what they *called* him?” She shook her head angrily. “Things don’t change because of stupid heroics. *People* don’t change. Even if we win the war, even if that creepy Dark Lord bloke is imprisoned, or defeated, or whatever. Potter and Black might get the victory parades, but no one’s going to... you’re going to be an outsider forever. Look at the way Danny’s been treated.”

“Mary.” Remus said, his tone very cold now. How had they even got into this? They never fought, “I’m not going to discuss this any further.”

“Don’t be angry with me.” She said, “I’m only trying to--”

“I know. But I’m not interested.”

“...Remus, I--”

“Why don’t we practice some charms? Exam’s in two days.” He stood up, pulling out his wand. Mary remained seated on the grass. She looked up at him, lowering her sunglasses, her brown eyes reproachful. She pursed her lips, then gave a little shrug.

“Ok. Just let me finish my nails.”

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics used are 'God save the Queen' by The Sex Pistols, and 'School's Out' by Alice Cooper.

Seventh Year: The Final

Chapter Summary

CW for some bullying and BAD LANGUAGE from start to finish.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Arseholes, bastards, fucking cunts and pricks

Aerosole the bricks

A lawless brat from a council flat, oh oh

A little bit of this, and a little bit of that, oh oh.

Dirty tricks.

From the Mile End Road

To the matchstick Becontree

Pulling strokes and taking liberties...

Oh fuck. Oh bugging hell. How on earth had this happened?! How had he let it get this far?! Remus's mouth was dry, his palms damp, and the less said about his insides the better. He wished he had Sirius nearby, or even James, to help him calm down. But no one could help him now. He was on his own.

McGonagall turned to him,

"Ready, Mr Lupin?"

He swallowed, hard, and nodded. Time to bite the bullet.

Fuck's sake. This was all Christopher's fault.

* * *

The whole mess had started four days earlier. The marauders were in the library studying for their very last exam; Arithmancy. Well, Peter didn't take Arithmancy, but he was there anyway; ostensibly for moral support, but mostly to provide sustenance. He'd been a godsend to Remus in particular, making hourly trips down to the kitchens and back with cauldron cakes, pasties, bacon butties and jam tarts.

"It's half eleven," Sirius yawned, "C'mon, I don't think my brain can absorb any more knowledge tonight."

"I didn't think your brain ever absorbed any---ow!" James winced as Sirius kicked him under the table.

"C'mon," he repeated, "It'll be curfew soon, anyway."

"We're with the head boy, I don't think curfew matters." Remus replied, scribbling as fast as his quill would let him.

But James had caught Sirius's yawn. He removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes, leaning away from the desk.

"Nah, Padfoot's right - we've been here hours. Let's call it quits and have a refresher session tomorrow?"

Peter was looking at Remus hopefully, clearly bored out of his mind. Remus frowned at all of them.

"You lot go, if you want, but I'll kick myself if I waste any time on this - it's our last exam!"

"You're hardly wasting time," Sirius said, "You've been in the library so much this term they're considering putting up a plaque in your honour."

"It's necessary." Remus said, "I want to beat Snape."

"And you will." Sirius soothed, "Come on, you're getting black rings under your eyes."

"Oh no," Remus sighed, sarcastically, packing away his papers, "My roguish good looks, ruined..."

"Shut up, you handsome prick." Sirius elbowed him lightly.

They gathered the rest of their books, cleaned up the crumbs as best they could, and headed for the library exit. There were still plenty of students studying, all in varying states of distress.

"I can't wait for it all to be over," Peter whispered, "Imagine! No more homework, forever!"

Remus must have looked stricken at this, because Sirius barked with laughter and threw an arm around his shoulders (that was a brotherly gesture, Remus decided, so he permitted it in public).

"You'll still have deadlines," James mused, yawning again as they entered the dimly lit castle corridors. "If you want to do ministry work. Dad complains about them all the time."

"Doubt I'll ever be as important as your dad," Peter replied, shoving his hands in his pockets.

"How are the applications going, anyway?" James asked him.

"Oh. All right. Mum says my step-dad might be able to put in a good word... you know, in case I don't hear back from anywhere."

"It won't be because of you, Wormy," James said, "They're making cuts everywhere - because of the war. Things are hard all over."

"Not for quidditch players." Peter muttered.

Sirius shook his head disapprovingly, but said nothing.

"I'm not going to be a quidditch player," James said, lightly, "Not until the war's won."

The unspoken thing here, Remus thought, was the fact that James didn't actually need a job, war or no war, talent or no talent. It was the same for Sirius, who was so wealthy he never talked about money at all. Though he didn't agree with the bitterness, Remus sympathised with Peter on this; the Pettigrews were firmly middle class, and while he would always have a comfortable enough life, he'd be expected to start making money as soon as possible. Whereas Remus, who was barely working class even on a good day--

He was interrupted from his thoughts by an odd noise up ahead, and stopped in his tracks. The others stopped too.

"What's wrong?" Sirius asked, "Forget something?"

Remus shook his head, listening. He whispered to his friends,

"There's someone around the corner." He could hear them breathing, but they weren't moving - neither coming nor going, which was extremely suspicious, given the time of night.

"Filch?" James whispered.

Remus shook his head,

"I think it's..." he strode ahead, turning the corner, "Chris!"

"Oh, hello... um... Remus?" Christopher smiled at him dazedly.

He wasn't doing anything. he was just standing there, leaning against the wall, staring into space.

"Are you ok?"

"Oh yes," the younger boy nodded again, emphatically, "Very well thanks. Very good. Very fine indeed."

"Is he... stoned?" Sirius was already at Remus's side, and was surveying Chris with thinly disguised amusement.

"I don't think so..." Remus frowned. He reached out and touched Chris's arm, gently, speaking slowly, "Christopher? What are you doing? It's almost curfew, are you on patrol?"

"Patrol?" Christopher stared at him blankly, before blinking, then nodding again, grinning, "Yes! Yes, that must be it!"

"He's confounded." James said. "Christopher? Has anyone cast a spell on you tonight? Or near you, and it backfired?"

"Maybe he did it to himself," Wormtail suggested. "I did that once, remember?"

"No, Chris wouldn't try to confound someone." Remus shook his head. "Chris, who was the last person you saw?"

"Hm? Oh er... was it... you?"

"No," Remus put his hands on Christopher's shoulders, meeting his eyes and trying to hold his attention, "No, not me. Concentrate. Before I got here, what were you doing?"

“Was I patrolling?”

“No, I mean... oh, come on, let’s go back to the tower, eh?” Remus kept his hand on Christopher's shoulder and began gently but firmly steering him up the corridor, throwing anxious looks at the others.

“Should we tell someone?” Sirius asked James, “Or... I dunno, take him to Madam Pomfrey?”

“I’m not ill!” Christopher piped up, chirpily.

James ran his hands through his hair, shrugging.

“I dunno. We’ll ask Lily, she’ll know what to do.”

Lily did not know what to do. She stood with a hand on her hip and a skeptical look on her face, and asked him a few questions, but was as stumped as the rest of them. He sat before her, quite happily, in an armchair, smiling back up at her. He didn’t seem to mind the interrogation, and while he couldn’t give them any real information, he answered everything with cheerful, blank politeness. Giving up, Lily clicked her tongue.

“I mean, he *looks* ok... and he doesn’t seem upset... Christopher? Did you get into a fight with someone? An argument?”

“I don’t think so.” Christopher said, thoughtfully, his voice thick and dreamy. He yawned. “I think I’ll go to bed, if that’s alright with you lot.”

Remus, James and Lily all looked at each other helplessly. Then Lily turned to James,

“Take him up, will you? Just make sure he doesn’t get lost on the way.”

James nodded, happy to be able to take action, and slapped Christopher on the back,

“C’mon then, mate, let’s get you to your dorm...”

Lily, Remus, Sirius and Peter watched them vanish up the staircase.

“Weird.” Lily said. “And no one else was around?”

“Not that I saw,” Remus said. “But god knows how long he was standing there.”

“Well, he was on the rota for patrol this evening,” she said, pulling out her little leather bound organiser to check. “I always tell the prefects to go round in pairs, though, so he shouldn’t have been alone. He’s usually so reliable. I’ll talk to him in the morning, maybe he’ll be a bit sharper then.”

“Doesn’t look like he came to any harm,” Peter said, offhandedly, flicking through an old copy of Quidditch Weekly, “Maybe he was drunk, or stoned or whatever, and he’s just trying to cover his tracks.”

Remus disagreed - it was too wildly out of character. But then, he hadn’t seen much of Chris, lately, they’d both been so busy. He remembered bumping into the younger boy in Hogsmeade a while ago - he’d been acting strangely then, too, but Remus had just assumed he was meeting someone and didn’t want Remus to know who. And if anyone respected other people's privacy, it was Remus.

James returned, saying Chris had seemed fine once he was in his bedroom, and they didn’t talk

about it much for the rest of the evening. Just one of those things. In a school full of adolescents learning to use magic, it wasn't entirely out of the ordinary for accidents to happen.

Talk soon turned to the upcoming Gryffindor vs. Slytherin quidditch match; the final match of the year, and the final game of James and Sirius's school careers. Remus zoned out a bit, letting his three friends work themselves up about it. Secretly he couldn't wait for it to be done with - as much as it made them all happy, and as much as he wanted Gryffindor to win, it wasn't half boring to listen to all the time. He picked up his Arithmancy book and returned to his revision, settling into the comfiest armchair.

"Moony, c'mon, bedtime." Sirius woke him, half an hour later. Damn.

Remus blinked, blearily, looking down at his textbook. He'd barely got past the first paragraph before falling asleep, his quill still poised between his fingers.

"Bollocks." He muttered, closing the book and stretching.

Sirius chuckled,

"Told you that was enough for one day."

Remus just yawned at him, getting up. The common room had cleared out almost completely, now, except for James and Lily, who were 'saying goodnight' on the couch. That usually took a while, so the other three marauders left them to it, climbing the stairs to bed.

* * *

The next morning, Remus was awoken by Sirius - or rather, the absence of Sirius. He was just crawling out of bed, and trying to be sneaky about it.

"Mmm, stay..." Remus reached for him sleepily, trying to pull him back. His hands ran over the skin of Sirius's upper arms. Sirius had fantastic skin, it was so smooth, and unblemished everywhere except for the backs of his legs. He kept talking about wanting tattoos, a thought which horrified Remus.

"Sorry, Moony," Sirius grinned, gently untangling himself, "Big game in two days, got to practice."

"What time is it?"

"Just gone five."

"Ugh." Remus flopped back down on the bed, throwing the blankets over his head, "You're all mental."

"Yup." Sirius laughed, "Go back to sleep, I'll see you later."

He left carefully, closing the curtains behind him. Remus rolled into the warm hollow Sirius's body had left behind, inhaled the scent on his pillow, and drifted back to sleep.

He woke up just in time to catch the last of breakfast, and then returned to the library where he met Lily for more Arithmancy study.

"I'm so tired of numbers!" Lily groaned rubbing her eyes. They were a few hours in and it would be lunch soon.

"I'm going to miss it," Remus replied, "I like the charts, they're relaxing."

"Well I'm just glad there's nothing like this in potions."

"James said you were looking into a job in an apothecary?"

"Maybe," Lily shrugged. "I'd like to do something like that. Maybe research for St Mungo's. Slughorn offered to write recommendations for me. But things will be complicated for a while I think. James is optimistic, but..."

"Yeah." Remus nodded. "We'll just have to see."

"Shall we go down for lunch?" She closed her book, brushing her hair over one shoulder, "The boys'll be finished soon, we can meet them."

Remus's stomach growled, and he gave in.

"Go on then."

Just as they were getting up to go, the library doors swung open, and Madam Pince screeched, "No running!"

"Lily! Remus! I need your help!" Christopher came charging up to them so fast his legs hit their desk, banging all the books forward.

"What's wrong?!" Lily asked, her emerald eyes wide.

"I can't explain, you just need to see..."

"See what?" Remus asked, re-ordering his book pile.

"I've... I've done something stupid. *Please* just come now?" Chris pleaded. His face was red and shiny from running, and while he was definitely looking more alert than he had the evening before, he was clearly genuinely upset by something. So they went.

He led them to the Charms corridor, and the whole way there kept babbling about how it had been an accident, and how he hadn't meant it to happen. Lily kept trying to get some sense out of him, but he wouldn't give them so much as a hint.

Finally, he stood before the closed Charms classroom door. Professor Flitwick really ought to start locking it, Remus thought to himself, as Christopher faced them, pale and trembling. He fidgeted with the sleeves of his robes, looking down,

"Ok... please don't panic... it was an accident..."

"Christopher, just show us, will you?!" Snapped Lily, tapping her foot on the flagstone floor.

Christopher jumped at her authoritative tone, usually reserved for students who were misbehaving, but he took a deep breath and pushed the door open, ushering them in and slamming it shut behind them.

"What on earth..." Lily breathed, when they saw it.

What stood before them was an enormous, quivering, glistening blue jelly. It was easily the size of Flitwick's desk, and just stood there in the middle of the classroom, translucent and wobbling. Remus stifled a laugh. In seven years at Hogwarts this was definitely one of the most ridiculous

things he's ever seen.

Christopher hung his head,

"He attacked me, it was self defence!"

Remus stopped laughing and looked again,

"That's a *person* ?! Chris! What the fuck?!"

"Remus, language," Lily elbowed him. "Christopher, who *is* that?"

"It's Roy. Guilderoy."

"Lockhart??"

"Am I going to get in trouble?" Chris blinked at them both, his brown eyes huge and frightened.

"What did you... *how* did you?!" Lily gaped.

"It was a jelly legs jinx. I just expanded on it a bit - Remus taught me!"

Lily glared at Remus, who held his hands up,

"James taught *me* ! And it never had *that* result."

"But why did you do it, Chris?" Lily asked, still staring.

"He was going to confound me again!"

"Wait, what? It was *Lockhart* ?"

Christopher nodded, shrinking from Lily's temper. He was embarrassed, Remus could tell. He looked at his feet.

"He did it the other day, but it backfired, I think I tried to dodge it. Maybe he's done it before, I dunno."

"But why?"

"He was... he was worried I was going to tell..."

"Tell what?!"

"He was... we... he..."

"Christopher, for goodness sake!" Lily folded her arms angrily. Remus felt a stab of sympathy as Chris's cheeks turned a deeper shade of red.

"Look, Lily, it doesn't matter now, does it?" He said, turning to her to try and shift focus away from Christopher. "We ought to get Lockhart looked at, first..."

He wasn't sure how he managed it, but in the end he convinced Lily to go and get Madam Pomfrey, while he and Christopher waited with the jellified Lockhart.

Once she'd gone, Christopher seemed to become even more anxious,

"I'm going to get expelled!"

"No, you're not," Remus leaned against the wall casually, pulling out his cigarette case. He offered one to Chris, who shook his head, fidgeting and worrying the cuffs of his sleeves. "James and Sirius have done worse than this."

"I've never even had a detention before!"

"Seriously?!" Remus raised his eyebrows as he lit his fag, "Well it's not that bad. You'll survive. So... do you want to tell me what's been going on?"

Christopher looked at him, his cheeks darkening again.

"It was just... we just..."

"I'm guessing this is who you were meeting in Hogsmeade that time?" Remus prompted, trying to make it easier.

Chris looked at his feet again and nodded.

"Ok," Remus exhaled smoke. He was surprised, obviously, and more than intrigued, but he had to try not to show it if he was going to get any more out of Chris. "So, you met up a few times?" Another nod, "And then..." Remus tried to piece it together, "Something went wrong? You had a fight?"

"Sort of, I... um..."

God, this was excruciating.

"Look, Chris, I don't care, ok? He's a prat who had it coming to him either way, and if you and he... well it doesn't matter, does it?"

"I don't want you to think I'm stupid, or... or naive or something. I didn't even *fancy* him that much, I swear, it was just... just kissing, and I just... you know, he showed an interest, and I thought - well, this might be my only chance."

"Oh..." Remus's heart went out to him. He touched his shoulder, gripping it in what he hoped was a comforting gesture. "Of course it's not your only chance. People don't get just *one* chance..."

"Well, whatever." Chris said, looking at the space just over Remus's shoulder, but deliberately not *at* Remus. "I suppose it has a lot to do with luck. Anyway, he was a prick. Turned out all he really wanted was to find out about the prank thing. He thought *you* and *I* were... he thought I could give him inside information."

"Well you could," Remus replied, "You did half the working out with me, you know more than Sirius knows."

"I didn't," Chris said, "I didn't tell him anything."

"Good. Knew you wouldn't."

Chris smiled at that, and met Remus's eye properly for the first time.

"I told him to keep his nose out. He got annoyed and called me something horrible. Then *I* got angry, and I told him I was going to tell everyone what we'd been up to, and he must have panicked."

Chris sighed heavily. “I *wouldn't* have said anything, I swear. I wouldn't be that nasty. I was angry, that's all.”

“I know mate,” Remus reassured him. “So he tried to confound you so you wouldn't tell anyone?”

Chris nodded.

“All I can think is that I must have tried to deflect it somehow, which weakened it. Probably why I was acting so strangely yesterday.”

“And this...” Remus gestured at the Lockhart-jelly.

“When I woke up this morning a bit more if my memory had come back. I realised what he'd done and came to confront him. I... er... I lost my temper a bit.”

“Well.” Remus snubbed out his cigarette, “I'm not going to have a go at you for that.”

Lily was another matter. She returned with Madam Pomfrey and Professor McGonagall. By then, Remus had already decided what he was going to do.

“Will one of you boys please explain what happened here?” Their head of year said, her eyes silvery and sharp. Remus was slightly taller than her now, but somehow McGonagall always seemed larger than life, especially when she was about to tell you off.

“No idea.” Remus said, promptly, ignoring Lily's look of horror behind McGonagall's shoulder. “Chris just found him like this, didn't you, Chris?”

Christopher looked desperately at Remus, then McGonagall, his mouth opening and closing like a fish. Finally he just nodded.

“Really, Mr Lupin?” McGonagall raised one dark eyebrow.

“Yep.” He nodded, hands in his pockets, trying to look casual.

“Mr Barley simply happened upon Mr Lockhart already in this,” she gestured at the enormous jelly, which Madam Pomfrey was now circling, slowly, muttering under her breath, “...altered state?”

“Yep.” Remus nodded, firmly. He'd have liked another fag, but wasn't *that* brazen.

“Then please explain,” McGonagall's lips curled at the corners, “How Mr Barley knew that this was Mr Lockhart at all?”

“Um.” Remus glanced back at the big blue blob. “Well. Looks like him, doesn't it?”

“This won't take long, Minerva,” Madam Pomfrey said, cheerfully, “No long-term harm done, but he'll be out of action for a few days.” She began waving her wand and murmuring incantations.

“I take attacks on students very seriously, nonetheless,” McGonagall replied. “One weeks detention, Mr Barley. And as for you, Mr Lupin, as this is your last month at school, I don't see that detention will be very effective.”

This was not a relief, to Remus. She was still smiling, which meant she knew exactly how best to punish him, and he wasn't going to like it.

“Give me detention if you want!” He said, quickly.

McGonagall chuckled, shaking her head.

“No, I think I have just the thing. With Mr Lockhart out of commission, I believe we have a vacancy for quidditch commentator.”

Remus practically felt the colour drain out of his face. The woman was clearly an evil mastermind. Anything but that. Over McGonagall's shoulder, Lily grinned.

* * *

James and Sirius thought the whole thing was hilarious, of course, after they'd finished cursing Lockhart's name. They loved the idea of Remus - who knew about as much about quidditch as he knew about football, or quantum physics - having to commentate their final match.

“I just won't do it.” Remus kept saying. “I'll just sit there with my mouth shut, there's nothing they can do.”

“Don't be ridiculous!” Sirius nudged him, “You need to sing our praises!”

“It's really just about following the quaffle,” James said, “If you can keep your eye on that, you'll be fine.”

“Oi, spare a thought for the beaters!” Marlene called.

“And the keeper!” Yasmine added.

Peter was less encouraging, and spent the rest of the evening sulking in the corner, brooding over his chess set.

“I'm sorry, Pete,” Remus tried him, after hours of silent treatment, “I know you'd have liked to do it, but remember this is a punishment for me.”

“I'd have been really good at it, too.” Peter muttered, arms folded tight over his chest. “I know everything about the team, you haven't even watched any of the practices.”

“I know, you'd have been amazing,” Remus assured him. “Will you help me?”

“Help?” Peter looked up, cautiously, “Help how?”

“Get me up to speed,” Remus encouraged, “Give me *your* notes, for once.”

“Yeah... yeah, I suppose I could do that.”

“I'll even ask McGonagall if you can sit with me in the commentator's box,” Remus said, “So if I balls it up then you can set me right again.”

“Ok!” Peter nodded, enthusiastic, now. “Yeah, you'll need to know loads... I'll start right now, Moony, I won't let you down!”

In the end, Peter produced more notes on the 1978 Gryffindor vs. Slytherin Final than he had ever written for any of his lessons. There were reams and reams of parchment with labelled diagrams, lists of players and their numbers, flying formations and a detailed explanation of what seemed to be the quidditch equivalent of the offside rule. He'd even written a little script of phrases Remus could use if he got stuck.

So, even after Remus's arithmancy exam was over (he was pretty confident he'd done a perfect job

on that, it had been a piece of cake), he now had another test to study for.

Still, nothing could prepare him for how it felt, now, sitting in a tower high above the pitch, a seat of red and green robed students beneath him, waiting for him to speak.

He felt queasy, and wished he hadn't eaten such a large breakfast. He'd also had a shot of firewhisky (courtesy of James) and half a joint with Mary before the game started, hoping that might calm his nerves. Unfortunately it seemed to have had the opposite effect, and Sirius's extremely unhelpful advice to 'picture everyone in their underwear' had got stuck in his head, so now Remus didn't know where to look.

"Mr Lupin," McGonagall said again, "Are you ready?"

Remus looked down at Peter's notes, shuffling them. He swallowed and nodded.

Peter had very neat handwriting, nice and round, but Remus's head was a bit foggy now - the whisky had sharpened him up at first, but that combined with the spliff was making him feel a bit dopey and warm. He pinched the inside of his wrist for some clarity.

"Mr Lupin," McGonagall whispered, pushing the microphone towards him. "The players are on the pitch."

"Oh! Sorry!" He blinked, startled, peering down at the grass below and clearing his throat. He read carefully from the parchment in front of him, "Hello... er, I mean... welcome, everyone, to the Hogwarts Quidditch cup final, 1978..."

His voice sounded weird, echoing out across the oval stadium, but he could hear cheers go up as he spoke, which gave him a bit of courage. He glanced at McGonagall, who smiled and nodded encouragingly. Remus returned his focus to the ground below, and tried to give a bit of commentary.

"Right, um. So, here we go... the teams are on the pitch. That's Gryffindor in red - Captain James Potter, and Slytherin in green - Captain Kerensa Smythe. Um... I mean not a lot to say, really, until they're all up..." He looked down at Peter's notes again: '*introduce players and their strengths*', "Oh ok, so the players... well obviously James. He's the chaser... he's pretty good, I'm told. I mean, he's the one who *told* me..."

A smatter of laughter from the crowd. Remus grinned, then swallowed again and continued.

"Um. Gryffindor keeper, Yasmin Patel, also very good, I suppose, I mean as far as I know, I'm no expert... Sirius Black and Marlene McKinnon, beaters - good beaters... I mean, the whole team's really good, let's just say that."

He heard Peter groan, sitting behind him, and a titter of laughter from the crowd. McGonagall was giving him a cynical look, but all he could do was shrug helplessly at her and list off the Slytherin players with equal ineptitude.

(He did, however, take great pleasure in announcing 'Slytherin seeker, Reggie Black,' - he was sure he saw Regulus's shoulders cringe at that.)

"Oh great, looks like they're about to start," Remus continued, settling into it now, "Yep, there goes the whistle, and - no surprises here - Potter is in possession of the quaffle. Blimey, he's fast, look at him go! Aaaaand it's a goal! Ten - nil to Gryffindor! Nice one, Prongs!"

The crowd cheered and James zoomed across the pitch, arms raised high in victory. He threw a

thumbs up at Remus as he flew past the commentator's tower, then high-fived Sirius mid-air, before returning his focus to the game.

This wasn't so bad, Remus thought; all he really had to do was watch what happened and then just say it out loud. An idiot could do it.

"Slytherin now in possession of the quaffle... er... I *think* it's Timothy Bulstrode... yep, ok... hm, not as fast as James, is he? Never mind, he's nearly there - argh! No, blocked by a bludger there from McKinnon, well done Marlene, that looked like it hurt!"

"Mr Lupin, a little less bias, if you please."

"Sorry, professor... ok, so, Potter back in possession, he passes it to Eriksson... Eriksson's really flying, she's almost --- oh bugger. Slytherin back in possession."

"*Language*, Mr Lupin!"

"Sorry! Bulstrode heading for the goal posts now... oh come on, even *I'm* faster than that... he shoots, and --- BLOCKED by Gryffindor keeper Patel! See, told you she was good!"

Cheers went up from one side of the crowd, boos from another. Yaz did a victory loop, beaming, and Sirius flew past the commentators box, grinning at Remus as he did so. Remus had to admit, quidditch was more exciting than he remembered.

"Eriksson back in possession of the quaffle now, passes it to Potter, Potter's charging up the pitch - see, Bulstrode?! *That's* how you bloody fly---sorry professor--GOAL! Twenty - nil to Gryffindor!"

"Regulus!" Peter squeaked behind Remus, his finger pointing over Remus's shoulder at the green-robed younger Black brother, who was now flying very fast indeed, a look of concentration on his face as he zoomed towards an empty square of sky.

"Looks like Slytherin seeker Black might have seen the snitch," Remus said, hurriedly into the microphone, hoping that the Gryffindor seeker was listening. "Yep, he's definitely seen something, he's speeding up, he's--- ah, bad luck, blocked by a bludger there from Gryffindor beater, Black."

Remus grinned, and could have sworn Sirius threw him a wink from across the pitch. Regulus, who'd had to brake and dive very suddenly, looked furious, as did the rest of the Slytherin team. Things turned quite nasty after that - both in the game and Remus's commentary.

"Eriksson has the quaffle again, is she going to pass to Potter...? No, looks like she's going to try for a goal herself - COME ON, ERIKSSON! OH FU--I mean, *FLIPPING* HELL! That was uncalled for! Eriksson hit by a bludger from Avery - Slytherin, and Knott now has possession. Eriksson looks dazed... is she... no, that's a thumbs up, good girl!"

"Mr Lupin, the match, if you please..."

"Right, so Knott has the quaffle... he shoots... ten points to Slytherin - but it's still Gryffindor's game! Potter has the quaffle, he's flying... he's nearly there, he's -- SHIT, WATCH OUT, JAMES!"

Kerensa Smythe, the Slytherin beater was flying at full speed directly into James's side, and was knocked out of the way in the last few seconds by Marlene, who full-body slammed right into the Slytherin Captain.

"Bloody hell!" Remus yelled, "Nicely done, McKinnon! That girl is brutal - oh, come *on*, Hooch,

that's got to be a penalty to Gryffindor, get off your arse and referee the sodding match! Uh oh, looks like little Reggie Black has his eye on the snitch again..."

"Mr Lupin!" McGonagall snapped again, "I shall take the microphone away."

"Be my guest," he offered, grinning at her. She shook her head, tutting. Remus returned to the game, "So we're now - what is it? Oh right, sixty - twenty to Gryffindor - just goes to show that cheating isn't going to pay off - I hope you're listening, Black - I mean the *younger* Black, obviously--"

"Remus!" Peter hissed behind him. "Calm down! You're supposed to be giving a balanced-- Oh Merlin!"

"Buggering *Christ*, that was close!" Remus yelled, as Regulus and the Gryffindor seeker both reach for the snitch at the same time, only for it to dart tantalisingly out of reach, sending both players careering into the stands, Regulus pulling up just a bit quicker than the Gryffindor seeker, but both of them miraculously staying on their brooms.

"Remus!" Peter whispered again, "Slytherin just scored--"

"They what? they - shit, sorry, folks! Slytherin scored again, must have missed that one..."

Remus apologised to the baying crowd, half of them laughing, the other half now booing *him*.

"Won't happen again!" He assured them cheerily, "Right, Potter back in pursuit of the quaffle, dodges a bludger from Avery there - Jesus, this game is violent - Black - the good one - catches up with the bludger and aims it at... yes, Regulus Black once again has to dodge. Lucky he's so used to weaseling his way out of trouble, eh--"

"Detention, Lupin," McGonagall was muttering, "You'll be in detention for the rest of your school career."

"FUCK ME!" Remus yelled into the microphone, as Sirius and Marlene both fired bludgers at the Slytherin beater tailing Regulus, forcing her to swoop so low she almost hit the ground.

"Completely mental!" Remus gaped, "I seriously have no idea why anyone plays this -- ah, but fairplay, it's distracted Regulus enough to... wait... Yes! YES! BLOODY YES! THAT'S GRYFFINDOR WITH THE SNITCH! WE BLOODY WON! OH MY GOD, THANK FUCK FOR THAT, I REALLY--"

"That's *enough* !" McGonagall snatched the microphone from him, finally.

He grinned at her again, too elated with the victory to care much about getting in trouble. Peter was jumping up and down behind him, too, which didn't help.

"Sorry..." he started.

"I am absolutely shocked," McGonagall said, sternly. "I expect this kind of behaviour from Black, but I don't expect it from a former prefect! I expect a letter of apology to the Slytherin team, *and* to Madam Hooch."

"Yes, professor." Remus hung his head and tried to look sorry, but he couldn't help his lips twitching a bit. He couldn't wait to see Sirius. He'd run all the way to the changing rooms if his hip (and inhibitions) would let him.

Fortunately, if there was anything McGonagall loved better than enforcing school rules, it was Gryffindor winning at quidditch.

“After the celebrations have finished, of course.” She said.

“Thanks, professor!” Remus looked up, beaming again.

“Honestly,” she laughed, shaking her head, “You’ve never reminded me more of Lyall.”

Compliment or insult, Remus didn’t care. For once, even a mention of his father couldn’t touch Remus’s good mood.

Chapter End Notes

Song is 'Plaistow Patricia' by Ian Dury and the Blockheads.

Er... do I need to explain what jelly is? Like a gelatin based dessert (I think Americans call it 'jell-o', or that might just be the product name?)

Seventh Year: Legacy - Part One

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

And as we wind on down the road,

Our shadows taller than our souls...

“You could nick it, bet it wouldn’t be hard.” Sirius said, standing beside Remus in front of the trophy case. “Just vanish the glass for a second.”

“Professor Flitwick would notice.” Remus raised an eyebrow, distracted now by Sirius’s ghostly reflection in the glass. “Or one of the Ravenclaws.”

“Nah,” the other boy caught his eye and grinned at him, teeth pearly white, “No one’ll miss it.”

“I think,” Remus replied, licking his lips and returning his gaze to the little gold figure on top of the trophy, “Lyard would have preferred it to stay put. This way there’s always a piece of him at Hogwarts.”

“Ahh, have you gone all soppy because it’s the last week?” Sirius teased him. Remus smiled, unperturbed,

“Yeah, a bit.”

Sirius chuckled, and leaned towards him confidentially,

“Me too.”

Remus pulled a face at him. “Come on then, I’m hungry. Lunch.”

They both set off down the corridor towards the Great Hall. Aside from Remus’s streak of detentions following the quidditch final, they’d all had a very relaxing week, with nothing to do but plan for the future. Which of course meant that they had done absolutely no planning for the future.

“We’re not leaving anything behind.” Remus said, thoughtfully, as they walked.

“Eh?” Sirius asked, distracted by a group of girls who’d walked past, giggling. Remus flicked his ear. “Ow!” Sirius ducked, “They were looking at *you*, Remus ‘fuck-me-we-won’ Lupin. What were you saying?”

“We won’t be leaving anything behind, like Lyard’s trophy.”

“James and I are on the quidditch cup. And Prongs is Head Boy, doesn’t that get recorded somewhere? And Peter won that chess tournament.”

“Oh yeah. Must just be me, then.” Remus sighed, forlorn.

“Er... there’s the whomping willow?” Sirius tried.

Remus just scowled at him. *Well*, he supposed. *That's what you get for trying not to be noticed.* He remained contemplative throughout lunch - which was fish and chips, with a choice of mushy or whole peas (Remus experimented with a combination of both).

"All right there, Moony?" James asked, between mouthfuls. "You're very quiet."

"He's worrying about his legacy," Sirius announced. "He wants a trophy."

"Shut up, no I don't." Remus blushed.

"If you ask me, that match commentary deserved a medal. Special services to the school," Mary laughed. "You can't go anywhere in the castle without hearing someone shout '*buggering christ, that was close!*' It's brilliant."

Remus grinned, feeling a bit better. He'd been quietly enjoying his fifteen minutes of fame, and had received enough gifts of cigarettes and chocolate to see him through the summer. Which was just as well, he supposed, because in a few short months he'd have to start supporting himself.

"Don't worry, Remu, if *you know what* goes off without a hitch on Friday," James whispered, leaning in, "Then no one'll forget us in a hurry."

"I thought the point was that no one knew who did it?" Remus quirked an eyebrow.

"Oh, come *on* ." Lily scoffed. And she had a point.

Still, Remus couldn't help but be a bit troubled. He didn't want his only monument to be the whomping willow, or that godforsaken shack.

"How do ghosts happen?" He asked, thoughtfully, watching Nearly Headless Nick drift by, chatting with the Fat Friar.

"Merlin, Moony, cheer the fuck up," Sirius groaned, mouth full of chips, "You'd have to be dead to become a ghost. And I s'pose you'd have to die *here*, too, on school grounds."

Remus shrugged. Dying at Hogwarts didn't seem very likely, unless something dire was going to happen in the next few days.

"A portrait, then." He said. "...Actually, no. I don't want to be able to talk to myself, that's creepy."

"They're really expensive, too," James said, "Our family never bothered."

"Typical Potters," Sirius said, haughtily. His plate now clean, he set the knife and fork neatly at its centre, and it soon vanished. "Of course the Blacks are all preserved for posterity in the family gallery."

"Even you?" Remus glanced at him,

"Not me." Sirius shook his head with a small smile, "I wasn't there when I came of age. I expect Reggie's been done now, though. More fool him."

"Remus!" Marlene came running up to the dining table. She looked flushed and excited.

"Yeah?" Remus sat up straight, looking up at her expectantly.

"Can I see you for a minute? I've got something for you!" She was hopping from foot to foot,

clearly very eager to tell him something.

“Er... ok...” Remus glanced around nervously. He didn’t like surprises, but he trusted Marlene for now, and she seemed so happy.

“Come with me,” she grabbed his hand and pulled him up.

“Should I...?” Sirius started, but Marlene shook her head,

“It’s private! Come on, Remus!” She practically dragged him from the hall, apparently not caring that he would miss pudding now.

“Ugh, slow down, will you,” he panted, feeling his hip click as they began to traverse the first flight of stairs.

“Sorry, I’m just so excited to show you!”

“Show me what?!”

“It’s private!”

He sighed, and just focussed on trying to keep up with her. Sometimes Remus felt he spent his whole life being dragged around this castle by people who were more athletic than him. When they reached Gryffindor common room Remus looked at her expectantly, and she suddenly turned shy, chewing her thumbnail.

“What?” He said, “Not private enough?!” He gestured about the empty room - everyone else was at dinner, probably enjoying their pudding. Hadn’t had apple crumble in ages, it would be just Remus’s luck if they were serving it today and he missed out.

“I think we’d better go up to your dorm.” Marlene said, setting off again. “Just in case.”

“Jesus Christ, Marls, what’s this all about?” Remus followed her up the stairs,

“Oh, I’ve suddenly decided I fancy blokes, so I’ve lured you up here to seduce you,” she casually threw over her shoulder.

“You spend too much time with Mary.” He returned dryly.

Once they were in the bedroom, she closed the door, and Remus went to sit on his bed, his legs sore. She looked around furtively,

“Why are there only three beds in here?”

“Acceptance testing for the prank went a bit wrong.” Remus shrugged.

Marlene just shook her head like an overindulgent mother. She reached into the pocket of her robes and pulled out a small shallow jar, and held it out to Remus.

“Trousers off,” she said.

“Excuse me?!”

“It’s for your hip!” She unscrewed the jar excitedly, her eyes bright and eager, “I made it for you, and Danny tested it and everything!”

“What... what does it do?” He peered into the pot warily. Whatever was inside looked like vaseline, semi-transparent with a thick, goopy consistency.

“I thought about what you said about how a mixture of muggle and magical medicine works best,” she explained, “So I did some experimenting. I tried valerian and comfrey and turmeric... turned out that ginger worked the best, who would have thought? Then just combined it with the right amount of anti-inflammatory poultice, and some dittany for extra strength. Go on! Rub it on!”

“Er. Ok...” Remus said, taking the jar and walking into the bathroom, locking the door behind him. He held it in his hands for a while, sniffing the contents. It smelt like ginger, which was fairly pleasant, and not too strong.

“You shouldn’t need too much,” Marlene called through the door, making him jump and retreat as far into the bathroom as he could. “Just smooth it onto the skin over the sore area.”

“Ok,” he replied, croakily. This was weird. But he owed to it Marlene to try, if this was a peace offering.

He unbuckled his trousers and pulled them down to his thigh, underwear and all. Then, balancing the jar carefully on the side of the bath, he scooped out a small dollop of the concoction - about the size of a grape - with his fingers, and carefully rubbed it onto his bare skin.

It was tingly at first, and then began to grow warm - but not unpleasantly so. He could feel it seeping into his skin, down into the joints and gristle and bone, warming and soothing as it went. It was a feeling he’d long forgotten. It was relief.

“Marlene!” He shouted.

“What?! Are you ok?!” She called anxiously.

“If you still want to seduce me,” he replied, “I’d probably do anything you asked me to right now.”

He heard her sniggering on the other side of the door,

“It works, then?”

“It’s a bloody miracle!”

“It’s bloody magic, you silly git,” she replied. “Come out, then!”

He hurriedly pulled his trousers back up and fastened them, striding over to the door and opening it. Not so much as a twinge.

His hip had bothered him for so long now he could barely remember what it felt like to walk without being conscious of his limitations. He beamed at Marlene, grabbed her around the waist and spun her around.

“Thank you!” He said, over and over.

She squealed,

“Lupin you lunatic, let me go!”

He kissed her on the cheek and put her down.

“You’re a lot stronger than you look,” she laughed, blushing, tucking her hair back behind her ear,

“Oh, I’m so glad it worked! I wanted to ask Madam Pomfrey to help so many times, but I thought you’d rather I kept it to myself.”

“Thank you,” he said again. “You’re... you’re amazing! I wish I had some way to pay you back!”

“You have,” she shook her head, “You helped Danny, even though you’ve never met him, and you knew how dangerous it was. And... you helped me, in the end, too. I know what I want to do now. We’re going to win this war, and when it’s over I’m going to start doing some proper research into lycanthropy, you know, set up *real* clinics so people get the help they need. If everyone else can see what I see in you and my brother, then maybe... I dunno, maybe things can be better.”

She was looking at her feet bashfully as she said this, but Remus couldn’t stop grinning, shifting from foot to foot just to prove to himself it didn’t hurt. *Nothing hurt*. He had to tell Sirius.

“You’re going to be an incredible healer, Marls,” he hugged her again. “Can I keep this?” He went back to the bathroom for the jar, holding it up.

“Of course you can!” She nodded vigorously, “I don’t know how long the effects last... if you wouldn’t mind making a note of it, each time you reapply? It’ll be useful to know...”

“Yeah, yeah, anything,” he replied, carefully screwing the cap back on.

“I’d better go and find Yaz - she’s got no idea where I’ve been all day, I told her it was to do with the prank, but I don’t think she believes me...”

“They’re down in the common room, the lot of them, they just got back from dinner,” Remus replied offhandedly, still staring at the jar in awe.

“How on earth could you know that?”

“Er...” he glanced up, awkwardly... “Good sense of smell... like *really* good.”

Her eyes widened, and she shook her head solemnly,

“I’ve got so much to learn...”

“Come on,” he laughed, patting her shoulder, “One thing at a time...”

* * *

Sirius was a true gentleman when Remus told him the good news about Marlene’s poultice, and did not say ‘I told you so’ even once. He was too happy listening to Remus babble about how much better he felt.

“I don’t know what I ever did.” Remus sighed after they’d gone to bed later that night.

“What d’you mean?” Sirius yawned.

“You know. You learnt *lenticular magna* for me, all the way back in first year. And Lily made me that reading aid, and you, Peter and Prongs all became animagi, just so you could spend time with me.”

“What’s your point?”

“I don’t know what I did,” Remus replied, shrugging, “To earn any of it.”

“Moony,” Sirius gave him a funny look. “You’re doing that thing again.”

“Eh?”

“We’re your friends! Friends help each other! As if you haven’t done things for Lily, and Marlene, and Wormtail, and James, and me... merlin, *me* more than anyone.”

“I know,” Remus replied, still smiling, “I know. I suppose I just feel so lucky.”

“You *are* soppy these days,” Sirius smirked, folding his arms behind his head. “Is this what it’s going to be like living with you? And I always thought you were such a tough nut.”

“Still tougher than you.” Remus glanced at him sideways.

Sirius’s eyes were closed, but he was smiling. Now seemed as good a time as any.

“Do you really want to live with me?” Remus asked.

“Course I do,” Sirius replied, eyes still closed.

“I mean... not just with James’s parents. In our own place.”

Sirius opened his eyes,

“Obviously. That’s the plan, isn’t it?”

“I...” Remus fumbled for the right words. He was very comfortable around Sirius now, feeling he could say almost anything. But sometimes it was the same old struggle. “I wasn’t sure. You know I haven’t got much money...”

“And you know I’m rolling in it,” Sirius shrugged, making the bedsheets crinkle. “What’s mine is yours, I don’t want you worrying about boring crap like that.”

“It’s only boring to you because you’ve never had to think about it.”

“Well now you don’t have to think about it either. Got it?”

“Ok.” Remus nodded. Something to revisit later, maybe, when there wasn’t a war looming, and they could have conversations about normal, everyday things. For now, if they weren’t talking about the war, Sirius preferred daydreams. Remus settled back, “Where shall we live, then?”

“London.” Sirius said, firmly. “Muggle London.”

“In a big house?”

“No.” Sirius shook his head, frowning a bit, “I don’t like big houses; too many empty rooms. If it’s just two of us, we don’t need all that space.”

This was a remarkably sensible consideration, but Remus didn’t say anything. He understood. But if they were being sensible...

“I want you to meet Hope.” He said. Sirius opened his eyes again,

“What?”

“She’s dying,” Remus said, matter of factly, “Lung cancer - a thing muggles get. Anyway, it can’t

be cured, and I don't think she has more than a year."

"Moony, I'm sorry... I had no idea."

"S'ok," Remus replied, "I've known since the first time I met her. I've known I wouldn't have long. She's not perfect, but she cares about me. I want her to see that I have someone. That I'm not alone."

"Moony..."

"I know, I know," Remus laughed, "I'm being soppy..."

"No," Sirius reached over and laid his hand softly on Remus's chest. "That's just one of the nicest things I've ever heard."

Remus turned his head too, and they looked at each other for a bit, both smiling in the shadowy darkness of the quiet night. When his eyes began to prick, Remus laughed again, looking away,

"Christ," he said, "Listen to us, we're worse than Potter and Evans."

"Don't tell anyone!" Sirius laughed, wiping his eyes quickly. "Only three days of school left, we've got reputations to maintain."

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics at the beginning are from 'Stairway to Heaven' by Led Zeppelin. \m/

"Pudding" in the UK (at least in the south, where Remu is from) is dessert. Any kind of dessert, not just that gloopy stuff Americans call pudding. Ice cream might be pudding, or a brownie, or a fruit salad etc.

Seventh Year: Legacy - Part Two

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

So here we are...

With freedom within our sweaty, greedy, grasps.

So remember this, boys and girls,

When your freedom comes along...

Don't

Pish

in the water supply,

Just because... school is out for the summer...

“We got lucky with the weather,” Remus commented, gazing up at the clear blue sky. “Would have been a nightmare getting them all outside if it was raining.”

He was not going to miss Scottish ‘summers’.

He and Christopher were alone in the owlery, waiting. It would begin any moment.

“Don’t make fun of me, ok?” Christopher whispered, looking down at the grounds from the high open windows, “But this is the most exciting thing I’ve ever done.”

Remus smiled at him fondly, and gave his hand a quick squeeze.

“I bet you this is just the beginning. You’re going to do so many exciting things, I know it.”

“I dunno, it’s going to be quiet with you lot gone,” Chris replied, peering down at the lawn below them, “I bet they make Regulus head boy... ooh! That’s the signal!”

A fountain of golden sparks shot up from behind the greenhouses, and Remus could hear Christopher’s heart begin to beat faster with the excitement.

“Let’s do it, then!” Remus elbowed him.

They both turned to look at the owls, hundreds of them perched in rows lining the tower walls, all the way up into the rafters. Beside them was a pile of letters - all blank except for the address. And they all had the same address.

Chris looked like he was ready to burst with the thrill of it all, and Remus stepped back, giving him the floor,

“You know the spell, you do it.”

“Really?!”

“Yeah,” Remus grinned, “Plenty of mischief to go around after this...”

“Ok!” He rolled up his sleeves, licking his lips. He uttered the incantation and swept his wand broadly around the tower. A low hoot, a ruffling of feathers, and then... utter chaos as all five hundred owls suddenly leapt from their perches and swooped down towards the two boys, who both ducked for cover.

Remus had never seen anything so magnificent; every single owl in Hogwarts spread its wings and soared out of the window, each one snatching a blank addressed letter as it passed. It must have taken two full minutes for them all to manage it, and when it was over, Remus and Christopher jumped at the window to watch them disappear down towards the courtyard, through the arches and on to their destination.

“Wow!” Chris kept saying, like a yappy little dog, “Wow wow wow!”

Remus just grinned, and thought about James and Sirius elsewhere in the castle, watching for that signal. And Mary, Marlene and Yaz, poised and ready for their own part, and everyone else in the castle waiting, waiting for the thing they had been planning since Christmas.

“Let’s go!” Remus said, grabbing Chris’s arm, “We can watch them all running out.”

If five hundred owls suddenly flocking to the dungeons didn’t get everyone out, then Remus was confident that James and Sirius’s patented exploding toilet seats would do the job.

They ran down the spiral staircase together (Remus taking the steps two at a time, still relishing his newfound mobility) and onto the main corridor, where pandemonium reigned supreme.

Every portrait was singing at the top of its lungs - from muggle pop songs to wizard nursery rhymes, whatever the third years had fancied when they cast the spell, Remus assumed. The suits of armour had left their posts and taken to following students around. Remus hoped that wasn’t too menacing - they weren’t actually *doing* anything, after all, just mimicking movements. It had been James’s idea - king of locomotion spells.

“I did it, Remus, I did it!” A fourth year Ravenclaw came running out of the nearest bathroom, followed by a mass of pink bubbles, “Blew it right up!”

“Well done!” Remus clapped him on the back, congratulating him.

“I can’t wait for the big finish!”

“Better hurry,” Remus advised, “Won’t be long.”

The fourth year nodded and set off towards the grounds, pink foam flooding out into the hall.

“You’ve taught so many people things they never would have learnt,” Christopher marvelled as they walked. The big clock outside the Great hall was whirling madly, hands spinning - so was every other clock, if the sixth years’ spell had worked correctly.

“Oh yeah,” Remus snorted, “Blowing up toilets and levitating desks. Very useful.”

“Don’t forget all the defensive stuff,” Christopher frowned, “I’d have been confounded again if not for you.”

They followed the steady stream of students exiting the building. Remus just hoped they’d caused enough mayhem in enough areas of the castle to get everyone outside onto the lawn. It wouldn’t be

any fun if half the school missed the main event.

“How is Lockhart?” He asked, casually.

“Fine, I think. Leaving me alone, anyway.”

“Good. S’pose you can handle him if he doesn’t.”

“Yeah.” They’d reached the courtyard now, and were within sight of the grounds. Christopher squinted in the bright summer sunshine and looked up at Remus, stopping a moment. “I’ll really miss you, though.”

“You’re only here one more year,” Remus replied, “You’ll be too busy with NEWTs to think about anything else; trust me.”

“No, I’m still going to miss you.” Chris said, firmly. “I’ll keep the study group going - but it won’t be the same. Everyone likes you so much, you’re patient with them.”

Remus didn’t know how to respond to that, so he didn’t. There was a funny lump in his throat, all the same.

“C’mon,” he pulled Christopher’s arm, moving towards the grounds. “Don’t want to miss it!”

More than half the school had gathered on Hogwarts’ expansive lawn, all chattering a mile a minute about the various interruptions and intrusions to their mornings.

“Did you see all those owls?”

“The Great Hall is flooded! *Flooded* !”

“The Ravenclaw door-knocker is speaking gobbledygook, apparently, won’t let anyone in.”

“The statue of the knight on the fifth floor threw water balloons at me!”

“Marauders, do you reckon?”

“Definitely.”

“No! I saw Emmeline Vance casting a spell on the portraits - and a group of sixth years planting dung bombs. It can’t be the marauders.”

“Well it can’t be *everyone*-- ”

The conjecture was interrupted as the last of the Slytherins - Regulus, Barty Crouch, Mulciber and Snape, much to Remus’s satisfaction - emerged from the castle. They were all plastered in green slime. Lily’s surprise bogey-bombs had worked a treat. Remus made a mental note to congratulate her later. She’d be a marauder, yet.

“You!” Snape came charging over, globs of pea green ooze dripping from his hair, from the tip of his nose. He pointed a long finger at Remus, face contorted with rage. “You did this! You and your filthy little friends!”

“Whatever’s the matter, Snivellus?” Remus asked, coolly, holding his ground, “You don’t look any different to me.”

“You! You!” Snape spluttered, laughter erupting around him as younger students gathered to see.

“Scourgify,” Regulus cast a cleaning charm on himself, restoring his clothes and hair to their usual impeccable neatness. He gave Snape a bored look, “Have some decorum, Severus. Don’t rise to their pathetic bait.”

“Hey Prongs, look, they got Snivellus!” Sirius appeared through the crowd, grinning, followed by James, and Peter, “Excellent!”

“It’s a good look, if you want my opinion,” James smirked, patting Remus on the shoulder by way of greeting.

At the sight of Sirius, Regulus rolled his eyes and walked away, joining a group of Slytherins near the edge of the lake, huddled together muttering between themselves like a murder of crows.

“When Dumbledore finds out you’re all behind this, he’ll--” Snape raged.

“What?” Sirius cocked an eyebrow, leaning on James’s shoulder casually, as though they were just chatting, “Expel us? On the last day of school?!”

“You’ll pay!” Snape snarled. He turned and began to stalk back to the school, his robes still dripping.

“Slow down, Snively!” Peter called out, hardly able to contain his excitement, “You don’t want to miss the grand finale!”

“Wormtail!” Sirius hissed, kicking his shin. “Shh!”

“Come on, it’s nearly time,” Remus said, trying to draw them all away from Snape. He was obviously about to lose it, and Remus didn’t trust the others not to push him over the edge.

Worryingly, they ended up quite close to Regulus and his clique, by the lake - but it was getting crowded and there weren’t many places to stand. Remus had never been one for public displays of affection, but he really wished he could hold Sirius’s hand right then, if only to stop him doing anything stupid.

No such luck.

“Reggie-boy,” Sirius nodded at his brother pleasantly, eyes glittering with mischief.

“Sirius.” Regulus replied, facing forward, head held high. He was like an alabaster statue; a cold marble version of his hot-blooded sibling. “I had hoped you’d learnt to put these childish games behind you.” Regulus drawled, sounding bored as ever. “Silly pranks and schemes won’t be any use to you once the war is won. The Dark Lord demands order.”

“Sod your stupid old dark lord,” Sirius tutted, folding his arms. Remus realised the two brothers were mirroring each other’s body language.

All around the lake, students were gathering; they were seconds away. Remus took the opportunity to glance about at the most familiar faces - there was Christopher, talking animatedly to a few of his sixth year friends, no double re-telling what he had done in the owlery. Marlene, Mary and Yaz were giggling between themselves, and a bit further along was Emmeline Vance, still a perfect ice maiden, flirting with poor old Roman Rotherhide. A gaggle of younger students from the study group were practicing the incantation they were about to perform, and beside Remus, Lily and James were holding hands, wands at the ready.

With a great clang, the Hogwarts clock tower struck midday, and James gave off a loud whistle,

commanding everyone's attention. It was now!

It seemed to Remus that they were all holding their breath for a few beats, and he gripped his own wand tighter, throwing a quick grin at Sirius, before turning his attention back to the lake - and what lay beneath.

All working as one, the members of The Marauders' Inter-House Pranking Collective raised their wands and gathered their strength, shouting; "*Attollo Magna !*"

Remus's knees weakened. They'd tested the a few times, just the four of them in their bedroom (hence Sirius's vanishing bed), but never with so many others - never so much magic at once. He felt as though he'd stuck his wand arm into a beehive; the magic began to thrum and vibrate through him, filling his mouth and nostrils like battery acid and pooling deep inside. Power. He was giddy with it; practically drunk. He shook his head doggishly, trying to maintain his focus and hold on - he had no idea what would happen if he let go.

Meanwhile, something was happening on the lake. The surface began to ripple and shimmer; an odd groaning creaking sound came from a mile below, and then... then... *POP*. With almost comical immediacy, the spell had worked. Remus felt a great twist inside himself - which was not unpleasant, but not ignorable either, causing him to gasp.

They'd done it. Students began to laugh and point, the Slytherins were crying out, one by one, stupid with shock. Even Regulus's mouth had dropped open.

There, hovering just meters above the still waters, directly over the dungeons, hovered every bed and trunk from the Slytherin dormitories. It was beautiful. Absolutely perfect in every way. The layout of each dorm had been preserved; all they'd had to do was transport everything a mile or so upwards. The barrier charm (soft-hearted Lily's idea) was working well too - meaning that no one's possessions were really in any danger of getting wet. They'd just have to work out the counter-spell, and everything would return to normal - provided all of the Slytherins worked together, of course.

That had been a Hufflepuff idea.

Remus's muscles were still twitching from channelling all that magic. He was a live wire; static buzzed at his fingertips. Luckily, very few people noticed; they were too busy cheering or screaming with dismay at the sight before them. Fireworks were flying over the tops of the beds now, spelling out;

Have a Great Summer, Slytherin! From; Gryffindor, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff!

"Are you ok, Moony?" Sirius looked at him, reaching an arm out.

"Don't touch me!" Remus snapped, stepping back and shrugging Sirius off, hurriedly. He didn't know what would happen; but he didn't feel at all safe to be around.

Sirius rubbed his own arm, looking hurt.

"Sorry," Remus breathed, shaking his head again, "Just give me a minute--"

"YOU!" Oh no. Severus had re-appeared, and was charging towards the marauders, wand raised, red faced. It looked like he'd got off most of the slime.

"Thieves!" He hissed, glaring at James and Sirius, "Give me my things back! Get them down at ONCE!"

Sirius and James were beside themselves with laughter, which didn't help matters, but Snape really had brought this on himself. No one *else* was ranting and raving like a lunatic.

Lily tried to intervene, breaking away from James.

“Severus, it's not what you think, it's easy enough to--”

But it was too late. Snape had already turned to the lake and aimed his wand at whichever bed was his. He was trying a basic levitation spell; but it wasn't going to work - the marauders had designed the spell *specifically* to ward against that kind of measure.

“No, don't!” Lily yelled, covering her eyes.

But of course Snape never listened; not when he felt he'd been wronged. It seemed to work for a moment; one of the beds jerked a bit, and wobbled. But only for a microsecond. The next thing anyone knew, it had come loose, plummeting into the sparkling waters below with a loud splash.

Severus stared; his mean mouth a hard straight line, dark greasy hair falling into his eyes.

He turned, wand raised, and Remus caught a scent - a scent he had only recognised twice before; like charred flesh. Dark magic. A curse. Another twist in his gut, this time far less pleasant, and Remus felt a change inside him.

“*Sectumsempra* !” Snape cried.

Remus didn't even need his wand; he had more than enough power, and without thinking, stepped in front of James, raising his hand as Severus flung the curse.

The world seemed to take on a strange red hue, and wind roared in Remus's ears, so that he only very faintly heard Lily's scream, and James and Sirius shout, “Moony!”

The curse hit Remus - but he felt nothing. It seemed to simply dissipate as soon as it touched his skin, leaving him with nothing worse than a feeling of mild sunburn. Still; he was weaker now than he had been two minutes ago. As if the force of the barrier he'd created had sapped him of all of his other magic.

He blinked, and everything came back to normal. Snape was still standing in front of him, looking terrified and furious in equal measure. Sirius's hand was on Remus's arm, and James was now charging towards Snape.

Remus sank slowly to the grass below, exhausted. He sat cross-legged on the ground, dazed, Sirius crouched beside him,

“Moony?!”

“I'm ok.”

“What the fuck was that?!” Sirius whispered, urgently. He sounded scared.

“I... I don't know.” Remus whispered back, bowing his head.

“It was just a counter-jinx!” Lily suddenly shouted, and Remus realised she was addressing the students that had gathered around, curious. Always quick on her feet, that girl, “Snape tried to curse Potter, you all saw it! Lupin just caught it in time.”

“Can you get up?” Sirius was asking, tugging at his elbow. “We'll go to Madam Pomfrey--”

“No,” Remus shook his head, fiercely, getting up, “I’m ok. Honestly. Just surprised myself. Wordless magic or something, I haven’t got the hang of it yet.”

“Ok...” Sirius was looking at him warily. Lily was on crowd control, and James seemed to have chased Snape away - or else he’d gone to Slughorn to formally complain about the prank.

Equilibrium restored itself. Remus gave Sirius his best smile, and gave his arm a gentle squeeze to show that it was all ok now. Sirius relaxed a bit, nodding.

The older Slytherins a bit further along the lake edge were now conferring amongst themselves. It seemed that Snape’s misfortune had benefited his house-mates. At least now they knew what wouldn’t work.

“Sort of nice, isn’t it?” Mary sauntered over, smiling broadly and completely oblivious to what had just happened. “See them all employing a bit of teamwork. We might have house unity yet!”

“Don’t count on it,” Marlene smirked, just behind her.

The Slytherins had begun to argue loudly.

They all stayed to watch the drama unfold a while longer. One particularly hilarious attempt to restore order resulted in every second bed lifting a few feet higher. Another spell caused them all to face west, for no discernable reason. After an hour had past, a group of Ravenclaws took an interest and began workshopping more ideas with the desperate Slytherins.

At that point, Remus was feeling normal again, which meant only one thing.

“I’m hungry.” He announced.

“Feast’ll be in half an hour,” Lily said, distracted by the squid, who was playing with one of the Slytherin’s bedside tables, trying to bat it with its longest tentacle.

“I might go up and get changed then.” Mary said.

Everyone agreed. Leave the Slytherins to it.

As they walked back up to the castle, grinning and laughing together, Remus was aware of Sirius’s eyes still on him, but still couldn’t offer any explanation. Whatever had happened had only ever occurred once before - that afternoon in the forest with Castor and Livia. And that was hardly a pleasant memory for either him *or* Sirius.

“Oi, Black,” Marlene said, appearing beside them, “Ever get your bed back?”

“Hm?” Sirius frowned, “Oh, no, I never did. Long gone now, I s’pose, seeking its fortune on the open road. Godspeed, old bed.” He sighed, wistfully.

Remus sniggered.

“Aren’t you worried the school’ll charge you for it?” Marlene said.

He shrugged. Marlene tutted,

“Spoilt brat.”

“Did you even *try* to get it back?” Lily asked.

“Well, we don’t know where it went.” James replied, chuckling at the memory.

“Not even a basic summoning charm?”

“No, we never--”

“*Accio bed !*” Sirius yelled at the top of his lungs, waving his wand.

A faint and distant rumble.

“Oh shit...” Sirius murmured.

The lake behind them began to bubble, and they all turned in time to see Sirius’s four poster bed rising from the water like a great mahogany submarine. Draped in seaweed and heavy waterlogged velvet hangings, it rose into the air and flew towards them so that they had to scatter and dive to the ground, covering the heads. It crashed on the spot Sirius had summoned it to with a heavy, squelchy THUD, and promptly splintered into several pieces.

Silence for a few seconds, as Lily, Marlene, Mary, Yaz, James, Peter, Remus and Sirius raised their heads once more, climbing to their feet in amazement. Then laughter from every quarter - especially the Slytherins still gathered by the lake’s edge.

Sirius just stood there, scratching his head.

“Hm.” He said. “Bottom of the lake all along, eh?”

It was still dripping. The sheets were green with algae and sand and grit piled up on the mattress.

“Oi, you wanker!” James said, approaching the rescued bed and snatching up a rectangular pile of greyish mulch, “Is this my quidditch magazine?!”

“Er... maybe...” Sirius grinned - then, catching the murderous glint in James’s eye, began to run at full pelt back to the castle, James chasing after him.

“I suppose now’s as good a time as any,” Peter whispered to Remus, “But, er... Filch caught me with the map earlier. He confiscated it.”

“What?!” Remus rounded on him, angry. That map was *his* ! His idea, his magic!

“Don’t be angry with me, Moony!” Peter cringed, “It was locked and everything, I promise! No one can get into it unless they’re up to no good -- *and* they’d have to break into Filch’s office!”

Remus stopped at these words. He was right about that. After all; anyone who could achieve both those feats would certainly be worthy of the map. And he had wanted to leave something behind; a true legacy. This way, perhaps Messrs Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot & Prongs might be remembered, one day.

He squinted ahead at the two dark haired boys chasing each other and whooping with laughter. He looked at the four girls, who’d all linked arms and were walking cheerfully back to the castle, voices light and carefree.

What did Remus Lupin have to be angry about? What had he to worry about? His heart swelled, and he was reminded of something Sirius had told him a few months ago. Love was something you *did* , not something you said; and every one of these people had proved that to him.

“Alright, Wormy,” Remus flung his arm around Peter’s shoulders, grinning, “You’re forgiven.

C'mon, let's catch up."

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics are from The Sensational Alex Harvey Band's cover of 'School's Out'.
(Pish is Scottish for piss).

The War: July 1978

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

All our times have come

Here but now they're gone

Seasons don't fear the reaper

Nor do the wind, the sun or the rain,

(We can be like they are)

Come on baby, (don't fear the reaper)

Baby take my hand, (don't fear the reaper)

We'll be able to fly, (don't fear the reaper)

Baby I'm your man.

Sunday 2nd July 1978

“Hurry *up* , Potter!” Remus hammered on the glass in the door of the phone box. “Other people need to make phonecalls y’know!”

James rather rudely turned his back, hunching his shoulders and speaking furtively into the receiver.

“Leave him be, Moony,” Sirius murmured, leaning heavily on the fence. He was wearing very dark sunglasses and looked paler than normal. “And stop all the banging, will you?!”

“Take another painkilling draught,” Remus tutted, “You’re just hungover, it’s your own fault for getting so smashed.”

“I was the life and soul, I’ll have you know.” Sirius retorted, folding his arms as Remus came to sit beside him.

The Potters had hosted the end of school party the night before, for all Hogwarts leavers and their friends. Yaz and Chris had come, even though they both had another year to go. A few members of the Order of the Phoenix were there too - no Dumbledore, but Ferox and Moody and Frank Longbottom and his pretty blonde girlfriend (now fiancée, apparently). Moody had called Remus over to them a few times, only to be intercepted by Mrs Potter.

“It's his school leavers party, Alastor!” She hissed, after the fourth time. “Let him enjoy himself for five minutes before forming a flipping war council!”

She said this so sharply that they desisted - Remus was a bit shocked too. That was the closest he'd ever heard Mrs Potter come to swearing.

The rest of the party had felt just like the Gryffindor common room - while at the same time feeling *nothing* like the Gryffindor common room. Remus tried not to be so sad. He tried to imagine that one day he would find somewhere else that felt as much like home as Hogwarts had.

Lily, Mary and Marlene all had to leave at midnight - they'd promised their parents they'd spend the night at Lily's. Apparently their families felt that after seven years of boarding school, enough was enough.

Which brought Remus back to the present, watching James through the phone box door, talking to his girlfriend. Who he had literally said goodbye to eight hours earlier.

"So unfair, him making us race down here - as if I could ever beat James 'hangover free since '73' Potter." Remus grumbled. "*And* it was unsportsmanlike. He knows I have a handicap."

"I thought your hip was better since you got that stuff off Marls?" Sirius frowned, making his sunglasses slip down his nose.

"It is." Remus replied. "I meant my smoking."

There was a low rumble somewhere in the distance. Sirius sat up, suddenly, ripping off his glasses.

"Is that?!"

Remus sighed.

"Sounds like it, yeah..."

In a few moments, the neighbour's motorbike came streaking through the village, growling all the way. Sirius gazed after it, starstruck. Once it was nothing but a shiny chrome dot in the distance, he leaned back, smiling to himself.

"Ah, I've missed her."

"It would be a 'she'." Remus muttered, folding his arms.

"Potter!" Sirius now got up to thump on the phone box door, "Get out here right now!" He turned to Remus, "Will you cheer the fuck up after you've had your phonecall?!"

"Yes." Remus said, petulantly, looking at his feet.

It was another five minutes of 'goodbyes' and 'speak soons' before Remus got his chance. He dialed the number eagerly, and coiled the plastic cord around his fingers as he listened to it ring.

"Yeah?"

"Is that how you answer the phone?!"

"Remus?"

"Hiya!"

"Crikey! Wasn't expecting you, did we set something up?"

“Nope,” Remus shook his head, grinning madly, “I finished school - I can call whenever I like now!”

“Brilliant!”

He heard some rustling on the other end of the phone and assumed Grant was making himself comfortable. Good. Sirius and James could wait a good long time. “So when you coming down to see me, eh?” Grant was asking now.

“Soon!” Remus said, automatically. He could apparate to Brighton in a matter of seconds, now the thought struck him. But that would be a tough one to explain. “Next week?”

That would hit the sweet spot between full moons, at least.

“Working Saturday,” Grant replied. “On lates at the pub. Saving up for a holiday... er... August?”

“Oh. Um. Well, ok,” Remus said, a bit disheartened.

“Sorry, just I’ve been waiting for a proper summer holiday ages, and I’m getting on a plane and everything...”

“No, no, August is fine!”

“Good, I’ll remember to get some milk in. So where you living now?”

“At my friend James’s. His parents are really nice.”

“Not moved in with lover boy, then?”

“He’s here too.” Remus explained, knowing it sounded a bit weird. “We’re going to start looking for somewhere to live soon, though. London, hopefully.”

“He rich, then?” Grant snorted, “Shoulda’ guessed that. Looks well-heeled, don’t he?”

“I s’pose.”

“He does. Got that good posture. Oi, let me tell you about this bloke I had round the other night...” Grant said, and began a very long and almost unbelievable story about an encounter he’d had with a fisherman (“a genuine, honest to jesuss fisherman, for fuck’s sake.”) who’d done something very odd in Grant’s bathtub before making a hasty exit in the early hours of the morning. By the end of it, Remus was hunched over in the phone box, wheezing with laughter, tears streaming down his cheeks.

“What’s so funny?!” James and Sirius were keen to know, when he finally emerged.

“Couldn’t possibly tell you,” Remus replied, hiccupping, “Muggle humour.”

“Reckon we ought to see how Pete’s doing?” James asked as they walked back to the house.

“Nah, you know how he is with hangovers,” Sirius replied, dark shades still firmly in place.

“All right, but we need to make sure not to leave him out,” James said, opening the garden gate, “I think he’s worried about it...”

“Yeah, yeah.” Sirius yawned. “Oi, quidditch?”

“Yes!” James grinned, “Just let me change...”

“I’ll get a book, then...” Remus rolled his eyes, though he didn’t mind really. They were going to treat the weekend as a holiday, it had been decided. Real life could start on Monday.

The three boys thundered up the stairs, James slamming his bedroom door as he went in search of one of his many quidditch kits.

Remus and Sirius were a little slower,

“Brighton in August?” Remus asked quietly, now they were alone. Sirius’s face lit up, and he took off his glasses,

“You want me to come, then? Yeah! Cool!”

“Of course.” Remus nodded, reaching the top of the stairs.

“Hello, boys,” Mrs Potter trilled, coming out of Remus’s room. He did a double take at that - he wasn’t used to adults going into his bedroom uninvited, even though it wasn’t really *his* room, only a guest room.

“Hello, Mrs Potter,” he replied, politely, hoping to mask his unease.

She was carrying a pile of his laundry, which was horribly embarrassing - at St Edmund’s he’d been doing his own washing since he was ten.

“I see Sirius was so drunk he ended up in yours, Remus,” Mrs Potter laughed, folding Sirius’s jeans over her arm. “Honestly dear, you ought to have just shoved him out.”

“Oh!” Remus felt his ears turning bright red as he gaped at her from the landing.

“Actually,” Sirius came up the stairs after him, “Remus and I prefer sharing. If that’s... er. Well we’d just prefer to, ok?”

Mrs Potter looked at him, then at Remus, who was still blushing, but managed to splutter,

“Yeah!”

“Well, if you like,” she nodded, slowly. “I suppose the bed’s big enough for two. Whatever makes you happy, dears.” She patted Remus gently on the shoulder, and kissed Sirius’s cheek as she passed him on her way downstairs.

And that was pretty much that.

* * *

Wednesday 5th July 1978

They were permitted a longer holiday than expected - two days longer, in fact. The invitations came late Tuesday night; a note each from Dumbledore, requesting their presence at a secret location known only to James’s father, reachable only by portkey. The notes vanished as soon as they’d been read, simply dissolved away in their hands.

They’d all been expecting something like it, but Remus was surprised how nervous he suddenly grew. He was not the only one. He and Sirius undressed for bed in silence, and as soon as they were under the covers Sirius was clinging to him, face buried under Remus’s arm.

“Tell me something.” He mumbled, thickly, “Anything.”

“I’m really scared about tomorrow.” Remus whispered. “It feels so real now. But I think it’s normal to be scared. I think anyone would be.”

Sirius just made a discontented sort of grunt. Remus squeezed him and tried a different tack. “But d’you know what scares me more?”

“Hm?”

“The fact that we’re planning to move in together and neither of us can cook.”

Sirius began to laugh, and eventually they must have both fallen asleep properly. When they woke up they were still wound around each other, sweat had gathered where their bare skin pressed together, and Remus had big wide red patches all over until he’d showered.

It was a bit of a walk to the portkey, which turned out to be a bright yellow rubber duck, left in some long grass at the end of one of the fields surrounding the village. Remus didn’t mind, he liked stretching his legs now it didn’t hurt so much.

“Can’t believe we’re only a few miles from London,” he marvelled, looking up at the cloudless summer sky, the rolling green hillsides.

“Garden of England,” James grinned.

Fleamont solemnly held out the duck for them all to put their hands on.

“All got your wands?” He asked, sharply, and they each nodded, swallowing hard. Peter was sweating and looked faintly ill - Remus hoped he wouldn’t throw up until they’d arrived wherever they were going.

They all touched the duck, and suddenly found themselves whirling through space and time at an incredible rate. It was worse than apparating, but better than floo powder, Remus decided.

Moments later, all five men landed in a very small, chintzy living room. The carpet was thick, soft pink, the sofas an ugly yellowish cream fake leather, and the wallpaper a hideous floral design with metallic streaks that caught the light.

“Fleamont?” A tall, thin, red haired man entered just as they were picking themselves up.

Remus had only narrowly missed landing on the glass coffee table, which was adorned with a bowl of soapy smelling potpourri.

“Arthur!” James’s father replied, cheerfully, reaching out to shake the man’s hand.

“Sorry, Monty,” Arthur raised a finger, “But Moody would never forgive me if I didn’t follow protocol. Now, let me see... what was the nature of the last owl I sent you?”

“It was a thank you card,” Mr Potter replied promptly, “Effie sent Molly a few of James’s old things for Bill and Charlie.”

“Lovely.” Arthur smiled and finally returned Mr Potter’s handshake.

“Boys, you remember Arthur Weasley,” Fleamont said, ushering them all forward to shake the man’s hand too. “This is my boy James, Sirius, Peter Pettigrew and Remus Lupin.”

“Hello there, what’s this?” Arthur was looking at the duck portkey, which Remus was still clutching.

“Er. A rubber duck.” Remus replied, looking down at it.

“I see, I see, and what’s it for?” Arthur advanced on him, peering down at the yellow plastic toy with earnest curiosity.

“Er... it’s just a rubber duck,” Remus shrugged. “D’you want it?” He held it out. Arthur beamed at him, taking it.

“Better not tell Molly! She thinks I’m mad already.”

Remus smiled, politely, privately thinking that Molly must be right.

“How is Molly?” Fleamont asked, “And the boys? Twins, did I hear?”

“Yes, three months old now,” Arthur nodded happily, “I did wonder if we ought to stop at five, but Molly’s keen to try for a girl; poor thing’s rather outnumbered, as things are.”

As he spoke, he led them out of the hyper-feminine living room, down a narrow hall and into a tiny kitchen, which had a conservatory built onto the back. Frank and Alice were in the kitchen, lining up a queue of mugs on the counter.

“Hello!” Alice smiled, “Tea?”

She took everyone’s orders, while Frank divied up tea leaves in various teapots, and they were all told to go through to the conservatory for the meeting.

“Whose house is this, dad?” James asked.

“Best we don’t know too much,” Mr Potter replied, “Come on, now, they’ll all be waiting.”

After the shadowy gloom of the narrow 1930s kitchen, the conservatory was blindingly bright and extremely warm. It had a clean terracotta tile floor, covered over with a homespun rag rug. The surrounding windows were glass and displayed an immaculately kept garden which had a double swing set and a slide; the roof was clear perspex and smattered with old dead leaves leftover from winter. There was a strong smell of fertiliser and geranium, potted plants were dotted about the place on shelves and end tables.

Remus didn’t notice any of these things at first, because the room was packed full of people. There must have been twenty or thirty witches and wizards, gathered solemnly around a large wooden table, or else standing, or crammed into the wicker garden furniture in the corner. Hagrid loomed largest - Remus had never seen Hagrid anywhere but Hogwarts, which was so big that it sort of compensated for the gamekeeper’s gargantuan proportions. In this hot little sun room he barely seemed real.

There were other recognisable faces; the Prewett twins, Mad-eye Moody, Professor Ferox, Ted Tonks, Emmeline Vance and Dorcas Meadows - no Dumbledore, but to Remus’s delight, Lily, Mary and Marlene were huddled in one corner, looking awfully young and shy in such a crowd. They greeted the boys with an eager kind of relief. Mary clung to Remus’s neck very tightly.

“You’re here!” He said, surprised.

“I never was that bright,” she smiled ruefully.

“Remus!” Marlene reached for him, “This is Danny!”

A tall man stood just behind her. He had Marlene’s smile; her ruddy cheeks and straw coloured hair.

“Oh, hello,” Remus nodded, suddenly shy himself. Sirius took a sideways step closer, so that they were shoulder to shoulder,

“Hi!” Danny said, grinning. He had a fresh scar creeping up from under the collar of his robes, but nothing on his face; not yet. He extended a hand for Remus to shake, “I’ve been looking forward to meeting you, I owe you such a--”

“Danny McKinnon!” James suddenly burst out. Having finally greeted Lily sufficiently, he’d only just caught sight of this awkward meeting. He strode forward, “Can I just say that you are absolutely, without a doubt, the *best* Beater the Cannons have ever had?!”

Danny laughed amiably,

“Thanks. I hear you’re a bloody good Chaser - it *is* James Potter?”

“Yes, and I’d love to--”

“Hate to break up the social club, gents,” Moody barked, “But we’ve some business to get down to.”

That shut everyone up, and they gathered around the table looking very serious. They began with a few introductions, though one way or another most people knew each other. When Sirius’s name was spoken there was a bit of hushed murmuring, but he just stared defiantly back at them all. Remus was proud of him - let them all see that you could never judge a book by its cover, or a man by his name.

After that, someone read minutes from the last meeting - Remus didn’t understand any of it. They all seemed to talk in a strange, grown up sort of code, and no one stopped to explain things like they did at school. Lots of names were mentioned; people in different corners of the country who were on their side - or who had gone over to the other side. Various policies being pushed through the Wizengamot, ways to influence votes; how to convince people to come around to the Order’s way of thinking.

Remus dared glance over at Sirius, James and Peter, and was relieved to see that they were just as puzzled as he was. Then the list of missing was read, and everyone followed that all right. Alice proposed a minute’s silence, which they all observed.

There were some more updates - everyone wanted to know what Dumbledore was up to, what progress he had made. Progress with what, exactly, Remus had no clue. Assignments were also handed out - Frank and Alice needed to be in Anglesey every night next week at 6pm exactly. A man called Shackbolt had to meet ‘our mutual friend’ ‘you know where’ on Friday. The Prewett twins were on the rota for guarding this location or that. Everyone nodded along as Moody singled them out.

Finally, Moody called an end to the discussion.

“Those who have to go, go,” he said, gruffly, “I’ll send word via the usual channels for our next meeting. Anyone needs to speak to me now, you’ll have to wait a bit.” He clambered to his feet, hands on the table.

Suddenly, the little conservatory was no longer silent and solemn, as everyone began chattering with the person next to them, furtively agreeing things, or else just catching up. Remus blinked. That was it?! He frowned, and looked for Mr Potter, who was pushing his way around the room to them,

“Come with me and Hagrid,” he said to their group, “You too, ladies, we’ll get you all up to speed, eh?”

Remus relaxed, finally. Thank goodness for that. It was deeply unpleasant, feeling so out of the loop. He felt incredibly young and naive.

“Not you, lad,” Alastor Moody had reached them too, and clapped a chapped calloused hand on Remus’s shoulder. “Ferox and I need a word. And you, McKinnon - Daniel, that is.” He added, to answer Marlene’s startled expression.

Remus’s eyes widened and he silently pleaded to Sirius for help, only for Ferox to join them all, laughing,

“Don’t look so jumpy, Lupin, I promise we’re not going to torture you.”

Remus laughed weakly, accepting his fate. He and Danny followed Moody and Ferox out of the conservatory back into the house; through the poky kitchen and along the corridor, up the brown carpeted staircase, which creaked heavily underfoot.

They entered a small box room, evidently a child's bedroom. There was a small bed in the corner with a stars and spaceships pattern on the duvet. The furniture was small and painted pale blue, and there were glow in the dark stars on the ceiling.

“Sit down, chaps,” Ferox nodded at the little bed. Danny and Remus obeyed. Moody stood. Towering over them both, his electric blue eyeball whirring in its socket.

“No prizes for guessing what we want to talk about.” He said.

Remus said nothing, because he didn’t think an answer was required, but Danny did.

“The werewolves.”

“Right.” Ferox said, sitting in a small desk chair, leaning forward on his knees.

He was as handsome as he had ever been, in Remus’s opinion. Still a broad, amiable ‘man of action’. His golden blond mane of hair was as lustrous as when Remus was fourteen, only maybe with some grey streaks now. An old, comfortable warmth bubbled in the pit of Remus’s stomach - a crush he had never even recognised at the time, which felt so innocent now. He smiled, finally, feeling a bit more at ease.

“I’m not sure how I can help,” Danny was saying, “I never met one until that night.” He shuddered slightly.

“But Lupin here has,” Moody said, fixing both eyes on Remus.

“You have?” Danny’s eyes flicked over Remus, taking him all in with surprise.

Remus knew what Danny saw, obviously; it was what everyone saw, a skinny, gawky eighteen year old with a too long neck and scrubby blond curls and knobbly knees and so many scars. He swallowed, feeling like a stupid kid in a room full of men.

“Yeah, I have.” He said, looking at his hands. “Two members of Greyback’s pack, Livia and Castor.”

“Greyback?!” Danny said in hushed awe. “Bloody hell.”

“Remus isn’t new to this sort of operation.” Ferox said. He sounded proud, but Remus looked up at him, beseeching, because yes he *was*, he was absolutely new to all of this - spying and secret meetings and warfare. He didn’t like this feeling. Everyone was expecting a lot.

“I just talked to them.” He said. “They don’t hurt me because Greyback told them not to, I think. They do everything he says, they’re loyal.”

“Like an army.” Ferox said, nodding, as if he understood. Remus gave him a long stare.

“No.” He said, “Like a family.”

“They’re a dangerous cult.” Moody said, sharply. “I don’t care what we call it. We need to keep an eye on them. Insight.”

“So what do you want us to do?” Remus asked, straightening his back. He felt more himself. Ferox was still looking at him, but with real respect now.

“Yeah, what can we do?” Danny asked.

Moody’s haggard, pitted face curved into a wicked grin.

“Ever heard of Knockturn Alley?”

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics are from Don't Fear the Reaper by Blue Oyster Cult.

So in the UK we don't really 'graduate' from school, we're just 'school leavers'. You don't get called a graduate until you get a degree. No ceremony, and until pretty recently, no prom!

The War: Infiltration

Chapter Summary

Big tone shift - there's a war on, after all. Some unpleasant stuff.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Whatever happened to

All of the heroes?

All the Shakespeare-os?

They watched their Rome burn.

Whatever happened to the heroes?

Whatever happened to the heroes?

No more heroes any more

No more heroes any more

Monday 17th July 1978

Remus travelled to Diagon Alley alone for the first time via muggle transport. Well; he actually apparated a lot of the way, but caught the tube two stops just to make it look convincing. Moody had forbidden him from using the Potters' floo connection in case he was followed, and Remus agreed.

He entered the alley via the brick wall by the Leaky Cauldron, and headed straight for the pub. Danny was inside, waiting for him, nursing a tumbler of firewhisky. He smiled sheepishly at Remus,

"Needed some dutch courage."

"Know the feeling." Remus nodded, grimly. He ordered the same from the hunchbacked innkeeper.

They moved away from the bar and found a quiet corner. Remus cast *muffliato* for good measure. They exchanged pleasantries, briefly - Marlene had begun training at St Mungo's and was enjoying it, Danny wasn't doing much of anything.

"I've got savings, obviously; I'm not exactly hard up," he sighed, "The Cannons paid pretty well, I could retire if I wanted. Just didn't expect to this early."

Remus didn't know what to say, because the idea of having a job at all still seemed too distant for him. The older man kept stealing glances at Remus's scars, too. "Sorry," he said, when he was caught staring, "I just... you know. Never seen..."

"I know." Remus replied, trying to relax a bit. He swallowed the last of his whisky and pulled out his cigarette case. "It's fine. Do you have...?"

"Only one or two." Danny replied. "S'pose I'll get more. Oh, and the bite, obviously." His eyes darted around as he said this, in case anyone was listening in.

"Of course." Remus nodded, lighting his cigarette and inhaling desperately. "Do you know who did it?"

"What's it matter?"

"It might," Remus shrugged, "I think it's important to them, anyway. I think the one who turns you... they have a connection to you, afterwards. You might recognise their scent. They might recognise yours."

Danny wrinkled up his nose in disgust.

"How'd you learn all this stuff?"

"Some of it's just experience. Some of it from books. Have you read anything?"

"No." Danny looked away, "Never been one for reading. At St Mungo's they said not to bother, anyway. Not like there's a cure."

"No," Remus frowned, somehow bothered by this line of reasoning, "No, there's not a cure, but... well there are still things to learn. It's not just a disease, you know, it's who we are."

"S'not who I am." Danny said, fiercely, his fist clenched on the table.

Remus looked away too, embarrassed. Danny wasn't ready for this, he realised. He was still in denial. Danny raised an arm, signalling to Tom at the bar for another drink. Remus wondered how many he'd had already. It seemed rude to ask; Danny was older than him, had been in the Order longer.

"So." Danny said, business like, "What's the plan? Go in, ask questions?"

"I don't think so..." Remus said, carefully. God, Danny definitely wasn't ready. "I think we need to be more... um... subtle."

"We want them to know who we are."

"They'll know who we are the second we walk in. The scent."

"Ugh." Danny wrinkled his nose again and downed his next drink.

"Look, why don't you stay here?" Remus tried, "Honestly, I've done this sort of thing before, I'll be fine. I can send you a signal, if I get into trouble."

Danny shook his head.

"Promised Ferox and Moody I'd do it."

“They won’t know, I won’t tell them.” Remus pressed, “Really, it’s fine, if you’re not comfortable, they shouldn’t make you---”

“I said I can do it!” Danny slammed his fist down on the tabletop.

Remus had a strange desire to start growling. It would be so much easier to settle this as wolves; he could just assert himself as the leader, and Danny would have to submit or get a cuff round the ear. He settled for just meeting Danny’s eye and holding it, sternly. It had the desired effect.

“Sorry.” The quidditch player said, sighing, tense shoulders now sloping down, wearily. “I’m just wound up, with the moon coming on Thursday.”

“I understand.” Remus said, evenly. “But you’ve got to keep it together in there, ok?”

“Yeah. Ok.” Danny nodded. He paused, giving Remus an appraising look, “Marls said you were the cleverest kid in the year.”

Remus felt his ears turn red.

“Hardly,” he said.

“She trusts you, though. I think I’d better too.” Danny had submitted. Remus straightened his back, a flush of animal pride running through him.

“Thank you,” he nodded. “Ok, so they’ll know us when we go in. The scent - I know you don’t like it, but I swear, it’s one of the most useful skills you have now, so don’t ignore it, all right?”

“It’s confusing, though.” Danny said, sounding frustrated, “Half the time I don’t know what it is I can... smell.”

“What about me?” Remus asked, “Could you identify me?”

Danny looked at him, quietly, concentrating. His nostrils twitched slightly. He nodded.

“Good!” Remus said, a bit excited now - he’d never had anyone else to talk to about this before, “It’s like... like something familiar, isn’t it? Something you know really well. You’ll get better at distinguishing different scents, as long as you stop trying to ignore it. I find that if I relax it’s much easier - hardly any work at all, really, it just comes naturally after a while.” Then he remembered something else that Danny ought to know, though he wasn’t sure how to phrase it. “Uhm... You might notice that um... females smell different too. Er. More attractive.”

“Right.” Danny nodded again, paling a bit.

Remus looked down, cleared his throat, and resumed.

“And the ones I’ve met? The ones in Greyback’s pack? They’re strong. They have really powerful magic, they don’t even need wands all the time. So it’s best not to make a move, because it won’t be like duelling - they’re hard to predict.”

“Merlin.” Danny breathed.

“Don’t worry.” Remus said, briskly, “They won’t try to fight us. I don’t think they will, anyway. It wouldn’t make sense; they want to recruit us.”

Danny snorted derisively.

“Fat chance.”

“Try to be understanding, though.” Remus said, “Listen to them - we want them to think we’re interested, right?”

“Right. Of course. Except we’re not.” Danny was looking at him oddly again.

“Obviously not.” Remus snapped. “But we’re still there to make friends. We’re there to talk, which means first we have to listen.”

“That’s not the impression I had from Moody.” Danny said, “This is reconnaissance, not a peace mission.”

“Well Moody doesn’t know anything about it.” Remus said, “Danny, listen to me. Stop thinking they’re your enemies, because they’re not. The one who bit you - he was wrong, ok? He ought to be arrested, he ought to be punished. But someone bit *him*, once. And because of that, his whole life changed, and no one looked at him like he was the same person any more. You understand that, don’t you?”

Danny was staring at the bottom of his empty glass. He didn’t answer, but Remus knew he was paying attention.

“They’re like us.” Remus said, firmly. “Except they’ve not been as lucky. You and me, we have people who care about us, who want to keep us safe, who know we’re more than just... just monsters. The ones we’re about to meet, maybe they never had that. Maybe Greyback was the first person who cared.”

“*Person*.” Danny spat, “How can you talk like that. How can you give a toss about what happens to them? How can you be so *calm*?!”

“I’ve been angry for long enough.” Remus replied coolly. “Now I’m ready to do something about it.”

They ordered one more drink, and then they left.

Danny said he had never been to Knockturn Alley before, and of course Remus only knew it by sight - and scent. The odour of dark magic was still there; acrid smoke, sour milk. It was a dim, cobbled street with crooked lanes winding off in different directions. The shop windows were dingy and displayed diabolical assortments of dark and dangerous artefacts.

The pub was easy to find. The Manticore’s Head had a horrible swinging sign hanging on a bracket outside which bore the image of a manticore’s bloody severed head on a platter. The creature had the head of a man, but a thick lion’s mane. Its eyes rolled upwards and its mouth gaped in a silent moan of misery. It made Remus shudder. It looked like Ferox.

He went in first, Danny more happy to follow than lead. He pushed the door open and the moment he crossed the threshold he caught the scent. It hit him like a wall, igniting him, making every hair stand deliciously on end.

Five werewolves. He knew each one before he laid eyes on them. Three gathered around a table in the far corner. Two at the bar. There were others there too; creatures Remus had heard of, but never seen. A vampire. Two banshees. A whole gang of goblins.

Danny was tense behind him, Remus willed him to calm down; it was so obvious. But there was nothing they could do now but go in; Remus heard the door bang shut behind them.

It was fairly dark inside; the windows covered with threadbare velvet curtains. The mahogany wall panelling and countertops were grimy, covered in a strange sticky dust that glistened in places like glitter. Behind the bar were enormous mirrors covered with shelves and shelves of bottles, each one a different size, shape and colour, glowing in the firelight like a wall of jewels. The fire roared, but it was strangely cool.

Remus approached the bar, as casually as he could manage. The figure standing behind it was heavily robed, hood pulled low, so that Remus couldn't see its face.

"Two firewhiskies, please." He said, instantly regretting the politeness. He'd spent too much time at the bloody Potters'.

The bartender turned around, and reached for a bottle. Remus fumbled in his robes for change. Danny joined him, standing close, looking around himself furtively.

The two werewolves at the bar were watching them both. That was to be expected, of course; that was what they wanted. All part of Moody's plan - Remus and Danny were invaluable to the Order, he said. A boy who'd been turned by Greyback himself; who Greyback was interested in, and a man who'd been recently turned, who the others would see as vulnerable.

Remus nodded at them, carefully. Danny didn't move a muscle, but that was ok - it was clear that Remus was the leader. The other two nodded in return. Remus sensed curiosity, but not danger. He straightened up, more confident.

They were male, both roughly the same height, only an inch or so shorter than Remus. One was stocky, with dirty blond hair, a square jaw, fairly handsome under any other circumstances. The other was one of Greyback's. His hair was shaved close to his skull, he had a thick scar on one cheek, and of course the tattoos covering his arms and throat, spiralling moon phases.

Glancing over these two men's shoulders, Remus tried to get a read on the three in the corner. Two of them were female, one male, all Greyback's. No Livia or Castor, which was a relief.

The whiskies arrived, and Remus knocked his back, maintaining eye contact with the two werewolves at the bar - or at least the one who belonged to Greyback. Danny followed suit. Greyback's man inclined his head slightly, considering, and then extended a hand. He had long, thick fingernails, black with filth. Remus shook it.

"Welcome, brothers." The man said, shaking Danny's hand too. Danny was visibly horrified by this, but Remus thought it probably just came across as nerves. And who could blame him. "I am Gaius. Come and sit with us."

Remus glanced back at Danny, who nodded, and they both followed Gaius over to the table in the corner. The seats looked like ancient church pews, and they were just as uncomfortable to sit on. Remus tried to subtly maneuver himself beside Danny, but Gaius slipped between them, splitting them up. There was nothing to be done; Remus just hoped that Danny knew when to apparate.

The scent of all of them gathered together was overwhelming and exciting. Remus felt alert, full of energy - but also very safe, almost comfortable. It was no wonder werewolves were so easy to recruit, he thought. People spent their whole lives in search of a feeling like this; it was a feeling he knew well. He'd had it ever since the marauders became animagi. Pack. Family. Home.

"Brother, sisters," Gaius was saying, "This is Jeremy," he gestured at the fair haired, handsome man he'd been talking to at the bar. "And these two are..."

“Daniel.” Danny said, stiffly. He drank from his glass, eyes darting around. He kept looking at the women, and Remus knew why. Gaius nodded agreeably, then looked at Remus expectantly.

“Remus Lupin.” He replied, steadily.

The atmosphere shifted, the two women leaned in closer, eyes glittering, teeth bared in what might have passed for a smile.

“Remus Lupin.” Gaius said. “The cub who attacked our brother Castor and our sister Livia.”

“I defended myself.” Remus said, raising his chin. Any sign of weakness would be exploited.

“We were under the impression that Remus Lupin has made his choice.” One of the women said, her voice low and rasping.

“I wanted to complete my studies. I’ve finished school, now,” Remus said, reasonably, “I’m exploring my options.”

The two women continued to glare at him, clearly not believing a word he said. But Gaius raised his hand.

“Our father is forgiving and generous,” he said, smiling, “He welcomes all of his children.”

“Brother,” one of the women said, “He is not to be trusted! He is Dumbledore’s lapdog!”

“He was elevated by Greyback *himself*.” Gaius snapped, sharply, turning his head and twitching his left hand, turning the wrist. The woman who had spoken up went rigid, suddenly, eyes wide, as if she was gripped by some enormous pain. “So hold. Your. Tongue.” Gaius said, turning his wrist again.

The woman relaxed, breathing hard. They could all hear her heart thumping. Remus felt sick.

Gaius smiled around the table.

“Brothers,” he said to the three new recruits, “Our father, Fenrir Greyback, welcomes you into his pack. We have been shut out, like you, we have been denied shelter, friendship, protection. Our father would return these things to you - and much more.”

“How?” Remus asked, hoping his voice sounded pleasant and inquisitive.

Gaius gave him a look. Remus returned it. It was strange. He knew that the thing to do - the correct thing to do for the mission, for his safety and for the other werewolves, was to lower his head, to look subservient, stay quiet. He had to get them to trust him.

But he couldn’t do it. Maybe it was nerves, or the strength of their scent and their power so close to him, or maybe it was just that old Lyall Lupin belligerence, but Remus found himself doing exactly the opposite. He held his head higher, taking advantage of how much taller he was than the others, even seated. He made clear eye contact and said,

“I just wanted to know how Greyback plans to provide us with shelter, friendship and protection.”

“You will see, in time.”

“Right, well that’s not very convincing.” Remus shrugged, “Sounds to me like a lot of promises, but not much of a plan, what do you two think?” He looked at Danny and Jeremy, the blond man.

Danny just stared at Remus, looking appalled. Jeremy, unaware of what was going on, shrugged, “I don’t care how he does it, as long as he does. Got nowhere else to go, my folks kicked me out.”

“What if you did have somewhere to go, though?” Remus said, quickly, “What if there was a safe place, and you didn’t have to pick any sides in the war--?”

“Remus Lupin, you are confused.” Gaius said, raising his voice. “No such place exists for us. The humans have made it perfectly clear.”

“The... the humans,” Remus said, carefully, thinking fast, “They’re in the wrong, I agree with you - The Ministry of Magic needs reforming - but change can only happen if--”

“They are not interested. They are only concerned with murdering our brothers and sisters; locking us up, suppressing the wolf.”

“And what exactly is Greyback going to do about that?” Remus persisted.

He knew why Danny’s pulse was racing; why he kept raising his eyebrows at Remus desperately over Gaius’s shoulder, but Remus couldn’t think about that now. It sounded like madness, pushing Gaius like this when he was clearly giving off danger signs, but it was almost as if Remus couldn’t stop himself.

“When you meet my father.” Gaius growled, “You will understand.”

“I’d like to meet him.” Remus said, keenly.

Gaius’s lips curled,

“There will be time for that. When you have proved yourself.” He looked at the others, “When you have *all* proved yourselves, you will earn the right to call him father.”

“And how do we do that?” Remus asked, leaning forward, keen to keep Gaius’s attention on him. He knew Danny would never join the werewolves, but this Jeremy kid - he was in real danger.

Gaius’s whole posture had changed; he seemed larger, his shoulders broader, he frowned at Remus.

“Three full moons spent with the pack,” he said, eyes blazing with intensity.

“Great,” Remus nodded, “Yes, ok, I’d love to meet him, can we do that? Can you tell me where--”

Pain shot through him, excruciating, burning; his bones were melting, his skin was bubbling, he wanted to cry out, but his jaw locked. Gaius’s eyes bore into Remus’s, furious, and suddenly Remus could hear him; hear Gaius’s voice inside his head.

Remus Lupin you are a fool.

It purred

My father wishes you to live, but only you. You will be obedient, or I will kill everyone in this room. I will kill...

Remus felt a strange, sifting feeling inside his mind, and knew what Gaius was doing. He tried to resist, but the pain was such a distraction, he hadn’t the strength. Gaius alighted on something he’d found, his eyes lit up maliciously,

I will kill... James Potter and Lily Evans... and Peter, and Marlene and Mary and... I will kill Sirius Black...

A surge of fury rose up in Remus and it was enough - only just enough, only barely - to break away from Gaius's fierce grip on his mind and body. He roared, lashing out with his arms and legs, because his thoughts were too muddled to do anything else. Shaking his head, as if to rid himself of Gaius's wicked voice, he lunged at the other werewolf, forcing him back against the pew, half on top of him, wrapping his hands around his throat and squeezing.

The other three werewolves - Greyback's werewolves - all tried to move, but Remus was so full of anger and violent emotion that he barely needed to *think* and they were locked in place.

"Is this what you mean by proving myself, Gaius?" He hissed, squeezing harder, so that the other man's face was turning red, veins bulging in his temples. "Have I earned your fucking respect now?!"

Gaius clawed at Remus desperately, but only when he was beginning to slacken and fade did Remus let go. He stepped back quickly,

"Danny!" He said, urgently, "We have to go."

They had to leave first; they couldn't be chased out, that would look like they were running away. *Oh fuck*, he thought, *oh fuck, why did I do that?!* What was he going to tell Ferox? Moody would have his bollocks!

The last thing Remus saw before he and Danny apparated was Jeremy's horrified face.

* * *

"Merlin!" Danny yelled, as soon as they were away from there. "What the *fuck* ?!"

They were in a field, miles and miles outside of London. They were supposed to walk from there to a bus shelter, where Moody would be waiting for a debrief.

"I'm sorry," Remus panted, shaking his head, "I got -- I lost my temper."

"I'll bloody say!" Danny ranted, "Wouldn't have let you have all that firewhisky if I knew you were going to flip your shit and try and take on Greyback's whole army single-handed!"

"That was *not* his whole army." Remus replied sourly, wiping sweat from his brow. He was still buzzing from the agony Gaius had put him through.

"And *that* wasn't the bloody mission, was it?!" Danny retorted, "Subtle, you said! Just listen to them, you said!"

"I realised that wasn't going to work," Remus tried to explain, "They're a pack; you have to dominate the leader, you need to show them--"

"You sound like them!" Danny said, suddenly.

"What?"

"You! All of your 'special skills' crap. You want to be like that, do you? No better than a pack animal? A fucking beast?!"

Remus stared at him. He didn't know what to say, he was too giddy, his thoughts were a mess.

"Look." He said, trembling, "Let's just find Moody."

"Right." Danny agreed, still red-faced, "Sooner we do, sooner I can get away from *you*."

Remus didn't reply, just started walking. His head hurt so much, a migraine building behind his eyes, the bright summer sunshine was like daggers after the gloom of The Manticore's Head. His mind was running a mile a minute. How would he explain this? How could anyone hear it and trust him ever again? What worried him most was that his first instinct was to lie.

Danny was walking faster than him, but then he hadn't just had his mind ripped apart by a... oh fuck. Was Danny right? Was Remus just like them, deep down?

They reached the bus shelter - long abandoned, covered in yellow pollen and sprayed on graffiti. Moody was waiting, punctual as always. He looked at them both, blue eye whirring wildly between them.

"What went wrong?" He asked, at once.

Remus looked at Danny. Danny looked at Remus, then down at his feet. Remus swallowed, and bit the bullet.

"I made a mistake." He said. "I let my temper get the better of me."

Moody looked at him for a long time. He was completely inscrutable, and though Remus knew Moody wasn't actually reading his mind - he knew how that felt, now - he felt as though he was being picked slowly apart all the same.

"Tell me everything, lad." Moody said, finally.

Remus did his best. He didn't mention the whiskies. He didn't mention the loss of control he'd felt, even before Gaius had hurt him. He definitely didn't repeat anything Gaius had whispered into his brain. He told only the story Danny might have told. And it worked.

"Sounds like you acted in self defence." Moody said, business-like, as if this sort of thing happened all the time.

"I went too far." Remus said. It was easy to be submissive now, to be polite and deferential to someone else. "I acted... I behaved badly. I put Danny in danger."

"Don't be so hard on yourself, Lupin." Moody said, sounding almost kind. "You were in a tight spot. You both got out of it. Do you need to see a healer? Do you know what curse it was?"

"It was wordless magic," Remus shook his head, "And I'm ok. It wasn't even as bad as a full moon."

This was a lie. He could still feel the remnants of it, his head throbbed and his nerves were vibrating. But it was going away. Pain often did, or else you just learnt to get on top of it.

Moody laughed gruffly.

"Good chap. Right, McKinnon, anything further?"

Danny shook his head. He hadn't said much while Remus was explaining himself, only interjected once or twice to confirm that it was the truth. He still didn't look at Remus, and Remus didn't

blame him. Moody, if he noticed, didn't comment on this odd atmosphere. He clapped his hands together. "Well then, I should say we're ok to apparate now. Lupin, I'm coming with you, got another meeting. McKinnon, you'll be ok to get back somewhere safe?"

"Yeah. No problem." Danny replied, hollow voiced. "See you." And began to walk away, back into the field.

Remus looked at Moody.

"He's angry with me. I don't think we should pair up again like that."

"You won't." Moody said, briskly.

Remus's heart sank. So that was it. Moody didn't trust him any more. The auror began to walk in the opposite direction from Danny, across the quiet country road. Remus hurried to keep up. The ground felt weird below his feet, like sponge.

Moody stopped abruptly, having apparently judged the shady copse of trees they were now standing in a suitable place to apparate from. He glanced at Remus,

"McKinnon can't hack it, that much is clear. We'll have him on communications or guarding a safe house. You'll be prepared to go it alone, next time?"

"I... What?!"

"You showed them who you are, today." Moody said, both of his eyes focused on Remus. "That's good. That'll get back to the pack. Stir them up. We want Greyback distracted."

"I'm not sure I understand." Remus frowned.

"Don't you?" Moody raised a bushy eyebrow. "I think you're more canny than you let on, Lupin. Right, come on, I've an appointment with Fleamont."

That was that. No more questions. In a matter of seconds they were on the Potters' back doorstep, answering the identifying questions from Euphemia, and then everything was normal; they were back in reality, surrounded by the gentle warm familiarity of the kitchen. It was like being jolted awake from a nightmare, and you just had to keep reminding yourself everything was ok now.

Moody disappeared off towards Mr Potter's study, and James and Sirius came running through the hallway to meet Remus. Sirius looked half mad, and they stood in front of each other for a moment, wide eyes full of words. Finally Sirius came towards him, enveloping Remus in a hug and burying his head in his neck.

"You're ok." He whispered.

"I'm ok." Remus said, fiercely, squeezing him back tightly. And he wanted to say it, oh god, he really really wanted to. But he had no energy left, so he just kissed him, and James was right there, and so was Mrs Potter, but it was the only thing Remus knew that could tell Sirius what he needed to tell him.

He put the rage away, the terror, the guilt and the fierce need for revenge. There would be a time for it. But not yet.

Song is 'No More Heroes' by The Stranglers.

The War: Home Front

Late summer, 1978

He rolled over for the hundredth time, the sheets sticking to his hot skin. He hadn't felt right since the full moon. Maybe even since before then. He was sleeping only a few hours each night, and now it was almost four o'clock in the morning, and he hadn't drifted off yet.

"Can't sleep?" Sirius rolled over too.

"No." Remus sighed, sitting up. "Sorry. I should go in the other room."

"Please don't." Sirius said, rubbing his eyes, "It's fine, I'm up too now, I'll keep you company."

"I'm really not in the mood to talk."

"That's ok. I can talk, I'm always in the mood to talk."

Remus smiled, though he didn't want to. Bloody Black.

"Go on, then." He murmured, lying back down slowly. His back hurt from the last full moon, and he'd rubbed some of Marlene's ointment on there before bed, but it was wearing off already. Sirius rolled over onto his side, stretching an arm over Remus's body and talking sleepily into his ear.

"I can't wait for tomorrow," he murmured, "I can't wait for you to see the flat finally. I never had anywhere that was just mine before."

"Me neither." Remus replied, eyes closing.

Sirius had bought the flat the week before, while Remus was recovering from the full moon. It had been - of course - an impulse buy, but Remus thought that was ok, really - he had too much on his mind to be much help, and it was Sirius's money, after all.

It was in London, and a muggle neighbourhood too. After the Potters' initial surprise at the boys' decision, Fleamont had insisted on ensuring that all of the standard security charms and alarms were in place before they were allowed to move in, so Remus hadn't even seen it yet.

"Tell me what it's like." Remus said, turning into Sirius's body, curling up. He didn't make himself small very often - after all he was bigger than Sirius, and it seemed silly. But just now, sleep deprived and filled with anxiety, it felt nice to bury his face in Sirius's night shirt.

"It's small," Sirius said, resting his chin on top of Remus's head, "Just one bedroom, one bathroom, one kitchen."

"Sounds massive." Remus replied. He meant it. He'd never imagined living somewhere like that, not in a million years.

"We can have it however we want; furniture, wallpaper, anything."

"I'll leave the interior design up to you."

"Fine. You can build the bookcases."

"Bookcases?" Remus raised his head. He hadn't thought of that.

“Yep, bookcases,” Sirius replied, a smile in his voice, “Space for the record collection too, obviously. And there are some garages nearby I might be able to rent...”

“We’re getting a car?!” Remus was a bit alarmed by this; he’d only just agreed to keep James’s old broom for travel on Order related business, he really didn’t fancy learning to drive too.

“Not a car...” Sirius said, evasively, “But I was just thinking... I mean, it would be really useful to have another means of transport.”

“There’s the tube.” Remus said, “Buses. London is actually sort of famous for them, y’know.”

“Yeah...”

“Have you already bought it?” Remus pulled away to see Sirius’s face.

“Er... “

“Sirius!”

“What?!” Sirius was grinning mischievously, “It’s an early birthday present to myself.”

“Your birthday isn’t for months!”

“Housewarming, then. I’ll get you something too!”

“Honestly,” Remus laughed, wrapping his arms around Sirius again, “You’re a liability. Spoilt brat.”

“Care home oik.” Sirius replied, laughing, his voice muffled by Remus’s shoulder.

They lay still and quiet for a little while, just like that. Remus relaxed a bit, but he still wasn’t going to sleep. It would be light, soon, surely. Every now and then he thought he could hear a bird singing in the garden. Wouldn’t get that in London. Just rattling milk floats and bin lorries and buses hissing and maybe the odd pidgeon. He couldn’t wait.

He held Sirius a little tighter. They’d been hugging a lot, lately. Contact seemed vital; it reminded Remus he was human.

“Everything ok?” Sirius asked, quietly.

“Fine. Just can’t sleep.”

“Still not in the mood to talk about it?”

“No.”

“Ok.” Sirius sighed a little. Then he moved his head against Remus’s shoulder, turning to kiss the softest part of his neck. Sirius’s hand slid down to Remus’s hip, slowly. “In the mood for anything else?”

* * *

Remus had sort of expected to see his new flat for the first time alone with Sirius. How foolish of him; he had forgotten that even outside of Hogwarts Sirius and James came as a pair. And wherever James went, Peter and Lily typically went. So it ended up being the five of them catching the train into London the next morning.

Sirius was buzzing with excitement, unable to sit still the whole way. He bounced about the carriage, ran down the escalators at Waterloo, and hopped from foot to foot on the underground platform. They were all in muggle clothes, and he was wearing his leather jacket, black jeans and combat boots. Remus liked to focus on these details, because if they were muggles then they weren't at war today.

The flat was off Leicester Square, in Chinatown. It was a seedy part of town, but that didn't bother Remus, nor did it seem of any concern to Sirius. It was crowded and noisy, the smell of Chinese food and cigarettes and open drains permeating the air. The phone boxes were plastered with adverts for escorts, and they passed at least two peep show cinemas.

"I love London." Remus smiled to himself. Sirius flashed him a grin.

They entered their building through a door in the back alley of an off-licence, filing in one by one, Peter loudly remarking on how small everything seemed, and how strange muggles were. Then up a short flight of stairs where they reached a concrete landing, with a bright yellow front door. Number 9.

"Home!" Sirius said, as he jammed the key into the lock, beaming at them all.

It was small. It was mundane, plainly furnished. It was basic. It was absolutely perfect.

They stepped directly into the living room, which was very modern, with no entrance hall. There was a doorway to the left leading through to the kitchen, which was sunny and bright, a little window over the gleaming metal sink. Lily made a beeline for the fridge - she'd very sweetly brought a bottle of sparkling white wine to celebrate with.

Remus went back into the living room, and down a hallway where there were two doors - one was the bathroom - sixties green tile with pink porcelain fittings - the other was a bedroom. Two suitcases - the clothes they'd packed up and sent ahead - sat side by side by the wardrobe. The bed was there already, neatly made with a maroon blanket and throw. Not a four poster; no secretive dark hangings. Just a perfectly ordinary bed for two.

"Well?" Sirius asked, anxiously, entering the room behind him. "I know it's really muggle-ish, but I didn't want to go overboard on the money... and it's much easier to protect, Monty even had Moody advising on some of the shield enchantments..."

"It's... great." Remus nodded. He was so happy. He just smiled, staring around. "It's..." there weren't words.

Luckily, Sirius was smiling too, watching him.

"I always know it's good when you don't have something sarcastic to say," he winked, "Come on, you barely looked at the living room!"

Remus followed him back through. Lily was pouring out tumblers of sparkling white wine ("We should have got you proper wine glasses as a present!"), and they all toasted, cheering loudly.

"Mate, you've got to show me how that eclectic oven thing works," James said, wide eyed, "And the radar-eater."

"*Radiator* ." Lily rolled her eyes, "Honestly, *how* did you get an Acceptable in Muggle Studies?!"

Peter was looking at the small brick fireplace, which was very out of place in the contemporary living room with its cream carpet and plastic Venetian blinds.

“Are you on the floo network, then?” he asked.

“Yep,” Sirius nodded. “For Order stuff, obviously. And you lot. Moody’s made it untraceable. The whole flat is unplottable, too.”

Remus couldn’t help feeling a bit put out by the fireplace. Even if it was essential, he didn’t like the idea that members of the order had access to their flat at any time of day or night. The thought of Alastor Moody’s head appearing in their living room made him shudder. Sirius, still watching Remus’s face carefully gave him a nudge,

“I got something else, too,” he gestured to the couch.

They all turned to look.

“You’ve got a telly-phone!” James suddenly yelled, almost spilling his drink in excitement as he pointed at the device sitting on an end table by the sofa.

“Calm down!” Lily chastised.

“A phone!” Remus stared at it, amazed. “Is it connected?”

“Yep,” Sirius nodded, proudly, “Just pick it up and dial - so I don’t have to hang about outside phone boxes any more--”

He was cut off, because Remus had practically knocked him over, throwing his arms around Sirius, and then - because after all, they were in their own home now, took his head in his hands and kissed him long and hard.

Lily and James cheered again, Peter downed his drink and went to pour some more.

* * *

“Do I look ok?” Sirius was peering at himself in the bathroom mirror. He kept buttoning and unbuttoning his shirt. “Should I wear a tie?”

“No,” Remus laughed, standing behind him, pulling on a plain grey t-shirt over his damp hair. “Stop fussing, you look fine.”

“Just fine?!”

“Sorry.” Remus replied, deadpan, “You look incredible.”

“Thank you.” Sirius smiled smugly at him through the mirror. “I just don’t want to let you down, I’ve never met anyone’s mum before.”

“What about Mrs Potter?”

“The Potters’ don’t count, they’re like my own parents, I don’t need to impress them.”

“You’ll be standing next to me,” Remus shrugged on a cardigan to cover his arms, “She’ll be impressed.”

“Don’t do that,” Sirius tutted, “I bet she thinks the sun shines out of your arse.”

“Are you ready?”

“As I’ll ever be.”

They left the bathroom, making their way out of the flat. They had only been moved in for a week and a half, and there were still boxes everywhere, but it already felt like home to Remus. He loved the jangle of keys in his pocket; the sensation of closing the front door on the world; having a place to be himself completely. The cramped soho flat was nothing like as grand as Hogwarts, but already Remus liked it better than anywhere else he had ever lived.

(Grant had put it best - Remus phoned him as soon as he had the chance - “A fixed address, eh? Blimey, we *have* moved up in the world.”)

They apparated from the landing outside, which had become a habit; it was secluded enough that no one would see them. In mere moments they found themselves on a quiet residential road in Cardiff, where it was - of course - just starting to rain.

“Sorry, should’ve warned you,” Remus laughed as Sirius yelped and scrambled to yank up his shirt to protect his hair, “Welsh summers aren’t much better than Scottish ones.”

They made the short walk to the hospital quickly, and Remus led Sirius to Sparrow ward with much more confidence than that first time he’d met Hope. He smiled and gave a little wave to the nurse on duty, before walking to the end of the ward to see his mother.

The curtain was drawn halfway across, so he peered around it first, to check if she was asleep. But no, she was sitting up in bed, flicking through a fashion magazine. He cleared his throat and she looked up. A huge smile spread across her thin face, showing every pearly tooth,

“Remus!”

“Hi,” he said, ducking his head shyly and walking around to greet her.

He kissed her lightly on the cheek. He’d done that three times now, having graduated up from her kissing his hand. Progress was slow, but every milestone felt enormous.

“I was hoping you’d come today!” She beamed, clutching his hand and looking him over as he folded himself into the orange plastic chair by her bed.

“Sorry it’s been so long,” he apologised, “I finished school, and then I moved... um. I’ve brought someone to meet you,” he glanced up at Sirius, still standing just behind the curtain, looking at Hope nervously. “Mum,” (second time he’d ever said that to her face), “This is Sirius Black.”

Sirius came around and stood at the end of the bed, hands in front of him. He looked like he was trying very hard not to fidget.

“Pleased to meet you, Ms Lupin,” he said, politely.

She didn’t correct him on the name, only smiled benignly back at him,

“Hello, Sirius. Are you a friend of Remus’s from school?”

“That’s right,” he nodded.

“Sirius and I live together, in London.” Remus said, testing the water. He watched her face, but she was inscrutable. She could be an auror, no problem.

“Doesn’t that sound like fun,” she said, glassy eyed, “Your dad used to take me for trips to London,

I loved a go on the double deckers.”

Ah. She was in the mood to talk about Lyall. These were far from Remus’s favourite visits, but he let her talk, because it seemed to make her happy. She started on a long and rambling story about all the times Lyall had taken her to London, where they’d seen all the sights, and then all of the various other places he had taken her - Edinburgh and Blackpool and Aberystwyth. Remus tried not to listen too hard. He didn’t want to start wondering whether Lyall would have taken them both to these places, if things had been different.

Eventually, with Hope showing no sign of stopping, Remus gestured for Sirius to take a seat, and he dragged one over from the next bed, which was empty. As he settled in, Remus noticed the suitcase at the foot of the bed. It wasn’t usually there. Was she finally allowed to go home?

“...and I had my first ever curry in a little restaurant in Wembley...” she was saying now.

“We’re in Chinatown,” Remus said.

“Lovely.” She smiled, though she clearly had no idea where that was. She was growing increasingly childlike, he thought, must be the medication they had her on. It ought to have been annoying, but it actually helped him empathise with her. “And you’ll have your exam results soon, will you?”

“We’ve had them,” Remus replied, “I passed everything.”

“He came top in the school in three subjects,” Sirius said, out of the blue. “History, Care of Magical Creatures and Arithmancy - and top marks in everything else!”

Remus blushed. That wasn’t strictly true. Ok, he’d earned ‘Outstanding’ in most subjects, but he’d only got an ‘Exceeds Expectations’ in Transfiguration.

“That’s my clever boy,” she grinned dozily, “Just like his dad.”

“Are you going somewhere, mum?” Remus asked, still bothered by the suitcase.

“Oh yes,” she nodded, resting her head back against the pile of pillows propping her up, “Yes, I’m off to the hospice tomorrow.”

Remus’s insides turned ice cold. His throat went dry. *No*, he thought, *no, I need more time*.

“Tomorrow?” He choked. She squeezed his hand again, her eyes sharpening,

“I’m ready, love. It’s time.”

“But...” he didn’t know what to say. He thought he might cry, but he didn’t want to upset her.

Sirius looked confused. He didn’t know what it meant.

“I’m making sure everything’s in order,” Hope said, matter-of-factly, suddenly sounding much more mature than usual, “If you leave me your address, I’ll make sure everything ends up where it ought to. And of course the funeral - I’ve told Gethin you’re to be notified as soon as possible, and that you’re sat at the front. Don’t let them put you at the back like some poor relation. You’re my son, and I’ve no shame at all, understand?”

“Mum, please...” Remus looked away, shocked by how distraught he felt. “I’m not... just not yet, ok?”

Her face softened. She sighed,

“All right, my darling. I’m sorry.”

Who the fuck is Gethin?! He wanted to shout. *How many surprises are waiting for me, after you’re gone?* He’d known this was coming, but it was still the worst news of his life. He couldn’t shake the sense of betrayal. They’d only just found each other.

Sirius grew uncomfortable in the silence that followed. He didn’t understand Hope and Remus’s shared inability to say the important things; Sirius could never see why everyone didn’t just say what they felt as soon as they felt it. But he respected their privacy, and got up,

“I’m going to get a cup of tea, Remus,” he said, gently, “Would you like one?”

Remus nodded,

“Canteen’s down the hall,” he said, staring at the floor, still holding Hope’s hand. “I’ll meet you there, in a minute.”

“Can I get you anything, Ms. Lupin?”

She shook her head,

“No thank you, dear. It was lovely to meet you.”

He inclined his head, gallantly, smiling politely - god, he could be charming in even the most desperate situations - then quickly left.

Remus let go of Hope’s hand, and buried his face in his palms. *Fuck* . Couldn’t he just enjoy something for five minutes without a tragedy?

“He’s a very nice young man.” Hope said, brightly

“Yeah,” Remus replied, huffing a joyless laugh, rubbing the back of his head, nervously.

“I can see why you like him.” She prompted.

She wanted the unpleasantness over, clearly. Perhaps she wanted to go back to talking about Lyall. Well, he wasn’t going to let her. She wasn’t the only one who could drop bombshells.

He looked at her, trying to meet her eye.

“Look, there’s something I really feel like I ought to explain, er. About Sirius. About Sirius and me.”

Hope closed her eyes with a soft smile and gently shook her head,

“It’s all right, *cariad* ,” she took his hand and patted it, “I knew the moment I saw the two of you.”

“You... really?” Remus stared at her. He’d never talked about this with anyone older than himself before.

“I’ve had a feeling for a while. I won’t pretend it makes no difference at all,” she replied, choosing her words carefully, “But it doesn’t change who you are, my darling boy.”

She reached for his hand again and he held it. She stroked his knuckles softly with her thumb.

“You love him, don’t you?”

“I...” Remus felt the familiar panic rising at the sound of that word, but as it was just the two of them, and he felt he owed it to her to be honest, he nodded. “Yes.”

“And he loves you.”

“I think so. Yes, he does.”

“That’s all I need to know, then.” She smiled again. She let out a great sigh, “Love. It’s the only thing you get to take with you, you know.”

The War: Autumn 1978

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stop your messing around (ah-ah-ah)

Better think of your future (ah-ah-ah)

Time you straighten right out (ah-ah-ah)

Creating problems in town (ah-ah-ah)

Remus peered over the top of his book through the cafe window to see if there had been any change in the street ahead of him. He looked at the clock on the greasy wall beside him. Five minutes to go, if Pete wasn't running late.

Remus looked at his book again. He hadn't really been reading it, he was too distracted. He found himself rarely in the mood for studying, these days, between Order meetings, strange and half-explained assignments, visiting Hope in the hospice - which he tried to do every other day, now.

On top of this, Remus and Sirius were learning to look after themselves for the first time. After a week of takeaways, Remus admitted defeat and asked to borrow a recipe book from Mrs Potter. Results had been mixed, so far. Sirius, meanwhile, seemed to have reached crisis point at the state of the bathroom, and dedicated several evenings to finally learning some cleaning spells.

They'd had a fight over whether or not to get a television (Sirius was bizarrely suspicious of this muggle technology; he couldn't see the point), and then another one over the motorbike (Remus hated everything about it, but most of all the highly dangerous flying charms Sirius was attempting).

Other than that, things were going pretty well. Well. As well as anyone could expect.

The clock kept ticking. Remus lifted the chipped mug of tea to his lips, drank, then grimaced. Stone cold. He'd been there an hour at least, but it wasn't as if he had anywhere else to be.

Since the botched mission to Knockturn Alley back in July, Remus had noticed a clear shift in the nature of his missions. He was often paired with Peter, and generally only sent on 'soft' assignments - passing on messages, collecting dead portkeys - once or twice he'd been stuck making sandwiches for visitors to the Potters.

Meanwhile, Sirius and James's fortunes had taken them in a completely different direction. They both spent much of their time with Frank and Alice, or the Prewett twins, up to all sorts of interesting things like advanced defense, guard duties, and even one or two midnight raids.

Sirius was having the time of his life. Remus was miserable, but not saying so. In other words, business as usual.

Finally, Remus looked up and saw movement. It was the end of the working day, and men in smart suits and hats began to fill the pavements. If you looked very closely, you could see that some of these men and women were dressed a bit less conservatively than the others. It was the end of the

day at the Ministry of Magic, too.

Remus got up, quickly, banging his shins on the orange plastic chair beside him. Hissing through his teeth, he limped slightly on his way out. Outside it was muggy - not sunny, but hot and sticky; headache weather. Thick, queasy storm clouds hung above the grey buildings, and a powerful reek rose up from the cafe bins, old food putrefying in the unseasonable September heat.

Remus hung back a moment, waiting and watching, not wanting to be seen. A tall, handsome young man strode past, wearing black robes and a bottle green waistcoat. He had sharp cheekbones and platinum hair, though he was very young - Remus recognised him at once as Lucius Malfoy, the man Narcissa had risked her life to marry. Remus watched him stalk up the street, fleetingly commending Sirius's cousin on her excellent taste.

"Oh, hello Moony,"

Remus jumped. Peter somehow still had the ability to take him by surprise - you almost never saw him coming.

"Christ, Pete, you scared me."

"Well if you hadn't been perving on Malfoy's arse--"

"Shut up." Remus was already in a bad mood, and much too sensitive to be teased by Peter Pettigrew, of all people.

"Didn't expect to see you," Peter was saying, glancing at his pocket watch and tucking it back into his trouser pocket.

He was wearing a tweed jacket and a stupid little bowler hat, mustard coloured. He looked like an off-brand leprechaun.

Remus scolded himself internally, ashamed of himself for being jealous of his friend - who despite only having scooped up a handful of NEWTs had managed to walk into an entry level position in the ministry, no bother.

"What do you mean?" Remus frowned, "I'm on time, aren't I?"

"Didn't you get Arthur's message?" Peter looked up at him, innocently, "Got cancelled. They sent Caradoc."

"Oh." Remus pursed his lips.

"So we can go home!" Peter said cheerily, "Thank Godric too, I'm exhausted. Work was mayhem today, I'm rushed off my feet."

"Right, of course." Remus nodded, his shoulders slumping.

He hadn't got out of bed until midday. Then all he'd done was read the papers and smoke and eat half a loaf of bread - which Sirius had bought only the morning before. This had been his longest conversation with another human being all day.

"Are you sure they don't need us?" He said, hopefully, "Maybe if we went along anyway--"

"Best not," Peter shook his head, "You know what Moody's like about protocol. Anyway, I'm starving, I barely had time for lunch."

“Really? Want to go and get something at the Leaky Cauldron?”

“Sorry, promised mum I’d be home. She worries, you know.”

“Oh. Of course.”

“Padfoot is at your flat, isn’t he?”

“Yeah, he should be back by now.”

“See you at the next meeting, Moony!”

“Yeah, see you.”

They walked off in opposite directions, Peter heading for the nearest floor grate (he still hadn’t learnt to apparate), Remus for the nearest quiet alley he could slink into and vanish in peace.

He tried to cheer up a bit as he stood outside the door to his flat. He shook himself, attempted to clear his mind, forced a smile. He opened the door.

“You’re back early!” Sirius’s voice trilled from the kitchen, and that was enough to throw Remus back onto his dark mood. It felt like an accusation.

“Mm.” He grunted, shutting the door and pulling off his cardigan, the hairs on his arms itching and prickling in the heat. It made his scars raised too, like barbed wire.

“What’s up?” Sirius appeared. He’d showered recently, his hair still gleamed. “Something happen?”

Remus snorted, kicking his shoes off and flinging them under the coffee table.

“Nothing happened. It got cancelled. Or someone else did it. Doesn’t matter anyway, it was just busy-work.”

“No it wasn’t.” Sirius tutted. “Why would Dumbledore give you busy-work?”

“Because I can’t be trusted to do anything else but they still want to keep me on side so I don’t suddenly go evil.”

“Moony…” Sirius had his hands on his hips, now.

Remus sighed and waved a hand.

“Forget about it. How was your day?”

“It was… busy. Long.” Sirius said, carefully, obviously not wanting to provoke Remus any further. “The usual stuff, you know.”

“I don’t know.” Remus muttered. “You get to hang around with Aurors all day. The best I get is *Wormtail*.”

“Don’t be like that.” Sirius sat beside Remus on the couch, “You’re doing plenty of useful stuff, still. And they sent you on that mission at the beginning of the summer, that was huge!”

Remus didn’t say anything. He hadn’t told Sirius what had happened, how he’d lost control *yet again*, and how Moody clearly didn’t trust him anymore, and Danny probably hated him.

In the pause that followed, Sirius tutted.

“Look, if you’re in a mood, I’d rather just get out of your way. I haven’t had a brilliant day either.”

“Fine.” Remus said, sharply.

It wasn’t fine. Part of him wanted to grab Sirius for a kiss, pull him into the bedroom, and apologise for being a dick. The other part wanted a full blown fight, with lots of shouting and swearing. Either way, he didn’t want Sirius going anywhere.

Sirius sighed and got up.

“Fine then.” He grabbed his keys on the way out. “Going to work on the bike,” he said. “I’ll get bread on the way back, seeing as we’ve run out *again*.”

Remus grunted in response, staring at a hole in his sock, rather than meet Sirius’s eye. They’d make it all up later, they always did.

* * *

The problem with not being at Hogwarts was that Remus never had any idea where anyone was. He missed the marauder’s map sorely, and felt anxious when he pictured Sirius, James and Peter out in the world, facing who knew what.

It typified the way he felt about almost everything now that school was over. At Hogwarts he had been in control; he’d had a place, a certain status. In the real world, he was nothing and nobody; back to the bottom of the deck.

As a mature and educated young man, he knew that he ought to face these new challenges with fortitude; set out to prove his worth, like James and Sirius - and even Pete. But Remus didn’t. He sulked.

After the cancelled mission with Peter there had been another long and confusing meeting with the Order, and barely anyone had glanced in Remus’s direction. Moody hadn’t been there, nor Ferox, so Remus couldn’t even go and ask them whether there had been any developments on the Greyback front.

It was nice to see the girls - Lily was apprenticing in the potions research department at St Mungo’s, and she and Marlene had made a whole gang of new friends at the hospital. Mary was at muggle secretarial college, and - like Remus - had been unimpressed with her assignments from the Order so far.

“S’pose they don’t want my mucky blood blowing anyone’s cover,” she rolled her eyes. He snickered. Good old Mary.

Since that meeting, Remus had spent much of his time alone. He slept in, listened to the radio, went downstairs to the corner shop to buy fags, and pretended to read. He told Sirius he was researching defensive magic, but he couldn’t see the point in studying for no reason.

Remus was sprawled on the couch one day doing the crossword in a free paper he’d picked up somewhere. Well. He wasn’t so much ‘doing the crossword’ as trying to write the most imaginative swear words he could think of into the boxes. He was stuck on twelve down, ‘_ _ _ E _ _ _ _ F’, when the phone rang.

It made him jump; the phone never rang.

“H-hello?” He said, croakily, realising it was after one ‘clock in the afternoon and the first time he’d spoken.

“Wotcher sweetheart.”

“Grant?”

“Someone else calling you sweetheart? You slag.”

Remus laughed, grinning ear to ear.

“Sarky tosser. Where have *you* been?”

“Here and there. Sorry, I’ve had a bit of a busy summer... er... you’re at home, then?”

“Yeah.”

“Brilliant, I’m five minutes away.”

“What?!”

“See you soon!” The line went dead.

Not knowing what else to do, and mildly stunned, Remus went to the bathroom quickly to check himself in the mirror. He was wearing a creased t-shirt, and threw on a jumper lying on the floor to cover up his scarred forearms. His hair never seemed to change, no matter what he did, so he ran his fingers through the curls and watched them spring back into place. He wished he’d showered when he woke up that morning, but it was too late now.

There was a knock at the door and Remus hurried to answer it, pointing his wand at the kettle as he passed the kitchen door to flick it on. His pulse quickened, and he realised how excited he was to see someone not involved in the war.

He wrenched the door open harder than he needed to, so that it nearly slammed into the wall.

“Hiya,” Grant stood in the doorway, wide-eyed but grinning, his face round and sunny as it had been at fifteen, chipped tooth and bright clothes and everything else that was right in the world.

“Hi!” Remus breathed, standing back to allow Grant entry, “I’m so happy to see you!”

“Blimey,” Grant nudged him with his trainer as he came inside, “If I’d known I’d get this sort of welcome I’d ‘ave shown up weeks ago.”

He stood in the middle of the living room, hands on his hips, staring around it awe. He let out a low whistle, “Done alright for yourself ‘ere, eh? Very nice.”

“Yeah, I s’pose,” Remus rubbed the back of his head. It was a bit messy, old newspapers and half empty mugs of tea all over the place, not to mention the overflowing ashtrays. Suddenly he was very embarrassed.

“What you got a fireplace for?” Grant chuckled, “Thought these modern flats all had central heating?”

“Mm.” Remus mumbled, “Cup of tea?”

“Champion.”

Remus went into the kitchen, and used a bit of wordless magic to hurry it all along, before bringing the mugs through to the living room, where Grant stood inspecting the book case. He looked so well. His clothes were clean and smart - he was even wearing a dress shirt, which had a wide floral collar and cuffs.

Remus gave him his tea, and did a bit of quick tidying before sitting down.

"I can't believe you're here." He said. Grant laughed,

"Me neither, to be honest. Been a long time, eh?"

"How was your holiday?"

"Oh, er..." Grant appeared to be blushing. His ears turned cherry red. "That was a bit of a fib... I just didn't want to jinx anything."

"Jinx what? What have you been doing?"

"I um. Look, don't laugh at me, all right? I've been doing evening classes. You know, get my O-Levels." He looked down.

"That's brilliant!" Remus said. Grant looked up at him cautiously, as if waiting for the punchline.

"Better late than never, I s'pose. I had my CSE Maths exam today, over in Russell Square. Bloody difficult, but I reckon I did enough to pass. Fucking Pythagoras was a right tosser, eh?"

Remus laughed.

"Well done, though! What brought that on?"

"Want to work somewhere other than a pub, one day." Grant shrugged, "Shagging all them students opened my eyes a bit. Don't want to be a thicko all my life."

"You are not thick." Remus said, firmly, giving him a stern look.

"Well, we'll see," Grant waved a hand, shy again. "If I get my Maths and my English sorted - and I reckon I did ok on English too - you ought to see my spelling, it's miles better - then I'm 'oping I can start A-Levels in January. I wanna do psychology, I think."

"Psychology." Remus said, in awe.

"Yeah," Grant chuckled, "Ricky - that's one of the students I was seeing - 'e reckoned I better do Politics, but to be honest I've had it up to 'ere with Trotsky. 'E was a communist."

"Trotsky?"

"Ricky."

"Right." Remus sipped his tea, thoughtfully. Everyone was doing things. Everyone had a direction. And here he was, just sitting by and watching, as per usual. Self-hatred rose inside him.

"So... how's Sirius?" Grant asked, politely.

"Yeah, good. He's out just now. Um... Uni lecture."

"Nice. And... your mum? How's she?"

“Dying.” Remus grunted.

“Bummer.”

Remus practically spat his tea out, laughing. Grant grinned.

“Oi, did ya hear about St Eddy’s?”

“What about it?” Remus frowned.

“Shut down. Last Approved School in Britain, apparently - they’re all ‘Community Homes’ now.”

“What happened to all the boys?”

“Some of them sent to Borstal. The rest got re-housed. They’re knocking it down, putting up flats instead.”

“Good riddance.” Remus said, darkly.

“I’ll drink to that,” Grant snorted, raising his mug of tea. They chatted for a bit longer, reminiscing. Grant wasn’t seeing anyone serious, and didn’t know how much longer he’d be in Brighton. He missed London, but he knew he needed to save up more money if he wanted to move back and make a proper go of it. He was so different from the last time Remus had seen him.

“‘Nuff about me, what about you? You at uni too?”

“I’m not really doing anything.” Remus sighed. “It’s hard to get a job right now. I’ve mostly just been here.”

“Lucky you’ve got this set up, eh?” Grant gestured around, picking up the cigarette box on the coffee table and shaking it. Remus nodded, and took one himself too.

“Yeah, lucky.” He said, glumly, as he lit it.

“You need to get out more, sweetheart.” Grant said, sounding serious.

“What?”

Grant tutted, blowing smoke and looking Remus up and down.

“Look at you, you miserable git. I’m not blind, y’know. Cooped up in here feeling sorry for yourself, is it?”

“No, I--”

“Remus,” Grant sighed, shaking his head, “I’m not being ‘orrible, I’m just saying. Remember when I left St Edmund’s, and I lived in that squat?”

“Yeah...?” Remus wished he could forget that, but it was burned in his memory. The dirty mattresses, the bare floorboards, the damp.

“I thought it was great at first - no more school, no more matron telling me what to do, just me looking out for myself.” He shook his head, pursing his lips, “I liked running away. I done it all the time, when I was a kid. Run away from me mum, from me grandad - the prick - from anywhere people tried to keep me in. And the thing is, they always *let* me. Matron never called the police, mum never tried to find me. Actually, you were the only person who ever tried to track me down.”

"I..." Remus hadn't known that.

"I dunno how you did it," Grant chuckled, scratching his chin, "Maybe you've got a magic wand or summink. But you found me. Twice. Thought about that a lot, over the past year."

"I just wanted to make sure you were ok."

"I know ya did," Grant smiled, softly, "That's what amazed me. Here's this lad - this clever, funny, posho lad - who *gives a shit* about me, when no one else ever did. Made me feel like someone worthwhile. So I thought I'd better *do* something worthwhile."

Remus didn't know what to say. He put his tea down.

"That's why I wanted to wait 'til my exams were all done before I saw ya," Grant continued, "Even if I fail the lot, I wanted to tell you I'd done it, I'm trying to be better."

"You never needed to prove anything to me," Remus said, earnestly.

"I know," Grant nodded, "I did it for me, really. I did it because running away and avoiding all the stuff that made me feel like shit was pointless in the end. If you want people to think you're worth it, you've got to start acting like you want it."

Remus laughed humourlessly,

"Sounds like you're already taking psychology."

"Been reading lots," Grant winked, "You get what I'm telling you, then?"

"Yes." Remus sighed. *Do something worthwhile. Stop moping.*

"Good." Grant said, brightly, "Cos if you're not happy here, I'll switch wiv ya. Nice flat, lots of books, gorgeous boyfriend..."

Remus laughed again, and kicked Grant's shin playfully,

"Shut up."

"Never. Anyway, best be off, I've got a train to catch - I'll be popping back in a month or so, though, s'long as I get the results I need."

"You will." Remus said confidently, "I know you will."

"Cheers. Give me a ring soon, eh?"

They hugged at the door, and Remus watched him go, hopping down the steps two at a time, whistling a pop tune.

Remus felt lighter; his cheeks ached from smiling. He closed the door and looked at the messy room. He felt like doing the washing up. Then he might nip to the shops and get something in for dinner. Sirius had been out all day; he'd like coming home to a proper meal.

Tomorrow, Remus could make a proper start on everything else. There was so much to do.

Song is 'A message to you Rudy' by The Specials

So much Brit-speak in this - not to mention 1970s specific stuff:

- Trainers - sneakers/tennis shoes
- Cornershop - a convenience store, usually on the corner of a block.
- GCE O-Levels - The standard school qualification in Britain before 1988. Taken at age 16, you needed this qualification to move onto further education. Grant left school at fifteen and never sat his exams.
- A-Level - 'Advanced level' educational certificate, typically taken between the age of 16 - 18, before university.
- Approved School - basically what St. Edmund's was. A residential institution to which young people could be sent by a court, usually for committing offences but sometimes because they were deemed to be beyond parental control.
- Borstal - Youth prison. (They're now called 'young offenders' institutions'.)

The War: Winter 1978-1979

Chapter Summary

This chapter covers some upsetting topics including the death of a family member and a funeral. Be kind to yourself, please!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Rows and flows of angel hair

And ice cream castles in the air

And feather canyons everywhere

I've looked at clouds that way

But now they only block the sun

They rain and snow on everyone

So many things I would have done

But clouds got in my way

Saturday 23rd December 1978

“Jesus Christ.” Remus grumbled, opening his sticky eyes.

He fumbled on the bedside for his glass of water, and found it empty. “Aguamenti,” he rasped, his wand hand shaking.

The glass filled with water, and he gulped it down greedily. He rolled onto his back, pressing the heels of his hands into his eyes, hoping to mitigate the headache threatening to start gnawing on his brain. He turned his head slightly and addressed the lump under the duvet,

“You awake?”

There was a sort of a shudder and a grunt. Remus tutted. It was too hot in the bedroom, even for December. He got up and went to the window to crack it open. He pressed his forehead against the cold glass and let the cold air wash over his hot skin.

They’d been out at the Leaky Cauldron the night before - pre-Christmas drinks. The marauders and Lily would be spending Christmas itself at the Potters, but everyone who was working had finished for the year, and Mary had suggested blowing off some steam away from the older members of the Order of the Phoenix, for once.

As with most of Mary's ideas, it was brilliant fun. Marlene came, and brought Yaz, who was visiting the McKinnons because her family didn't do Christmas anyway. Frank and Alice popped by to say hello, and Sirius and James insisted on getting in every other round.

After last orders, those still standing had piled into a taxi back to Remus and Sirius's flat, where they may not have had any milk or bread in, but the bar was always fully stocked.

Everything had been a bit of a blur, after that. Remus had a horrible feeling that he and Lily had started singing muggle Christmas Carols at some point.

He groaned loudly, "Why did you let me drink so much?!"

"Oi, don't blame me!" Lily suddenly appeared, her fluffy red hair sticking up like a dandelion as she emerged from under the duvet.

Remus jumped, whirling around. He wrapped his arms protectively around himself,

"Fucking hell, Evans, what are you doing here?!"

"Couldn't get James to leave," she yawned, "And I wasn't going to sleep on the couch, they started building a fort."

"This is the second time you've shown up in my bedroom unannounced, Evans, people will talk." Remus searched for a t-shirt.

"Second time I've caught you in your pants too," she laughed, "Oh get back in, you big jessy, it's still early."

He did, but only because the room was cold now, and he didn't fancy finding out what James and Sirius had done to the living room. T-shirt on, he crawled back under the duvet, and Lily wrapped her arms around his waist, her long hair tickling under his chin, like Sirius's did. He stroked her shoulder. She was so nice and small.

"D'you reckon if I'd agreed to go out with you in fourth year this is what our life would be like?" He asked, conversationally.

"Oh god," she groaned, covering her eyes with her fingers, "Do you have to remind me?!"

He laughed,

"I don't know why you're embarrassed, I was the oblivious one."

"I had such a crush on you!"

"Shh," he chuckled, "James took weeks to forgive me, I had to swear under truth serum that I had no nefarious intentions towards you."

"That idiot. I love him."

"Mm."

"I'm so glad it's Christmas," she sighed, "We all need a break, don't we?"

"Yeah."

"I'm supposed to be packing today, then at James's parents this evening - will you be there?"

“Sirius might,” Remus said, “I’m visiting my mother. You know she’s... um. She’s in the hospice, now.”

“Oh, of course!” Lily gave him a squeeze. “Sorry love. How is she?”

“I don’t think they expected her to make it all the way to Christmas. But she’s hanging on.”

“Oh Remus.” Lily sighed, sadly.

“S’fine.” Remus pulled away, deciding he might as well get up after all. “Right. I need a cup of tea and a ciggie.” He said, getting out of bed and pulling his jeans on.

“Ugh, you two really need to give up smoking,” Lily said, sitting up, “This duvet stinks.”

“Don’t tell me you’ve never had a cheeky post-coital fag, Evans?” Remus winked, heading for the door.

“Post c--?... oh my god, *Remus* !”

He was still smirking to himself when he entered the living room, which looked like a bomb had hit it. The sofa had been moved to the middle of the room for some reason, and the cushions removed. James was fast asleep, sprawled across what looked like a giant cream mattress on the floor. Sirius was curled up at James’s feet with one of Remus’s jumpers rolled up under his head.

Remus edged into the kitchen, flicking the kettle on. Every surface was sticky with something sweet and alcoholic; there were mugs and glasses sitting about, half full, some with half-smoked cigarettes floating in them. Remus grimaced and felt his stomach contract, so he opened a window for air. He really didn’t want to be sick, if he could help it.

Mary had written ‘Merry Christmas, Blood Traitors!’ on the fridge door in cheerful pink lipstick, with three big ‘X’ kisses below. She was spending the rest of her Christmas in Jamaica - the first time she had ever visited her grandparents’ home country. Remus was glad of it. Christmas had never been a good time as far as the war was concerned, and having Mary as far away from danger as possible made him feel a bit better.

He wasn’t thrilled about doing Christmas at the Potters - though he felt guilty even thinking that. Sirius would never consider spending the holiday anywhere else, so of course Remus would go along with it - and it wasn’t anything to do with Mr and Mrs Potter, who had been better to him than any real family he had. It was the war, and the Order, and bloody Moody, who was sure to be there too.

“Is that the kettle?” Sirius wailed from the living room.

“Yep.” Remus called back, “Two ticks.”

“You’re a hero amongst men, Moony,” James said when Remus arrived in the living room with a tray of milky cups of tea.

“Oh, I know,” Remus nodded, sipping from his cup. He perched on the arm of the sofa, “What the fuck have you done to my furniture?”

“Brilliant, isn’t it?” Sirius grinned up at him, cross legged on the gigantic sofa cushion, “Prongs’ idea - we did an engorgement charm.”

“Shall we help you two clean up?” Lily asked, padding through from the bedroom. She picked up

a cup of tea and sat down next to James, leaning into his shoulder sleepily.

“Breakfast first.” Remus said, quickly. “Fry up?”

“Fry up.” They all agreed in unison.

They went to the nearest greasy spoon cafe and ordered Full Englishes all round, after which everyone felt much better prepared to face the day. After breakfast, Sirius, Lily and James started work tidying the flat, while Remus (at Sirius’s insistence) got himself ready to visit Hope.

He didn’t wear a suit; that would have been overkill, even at Christmas, but he made an effort, ironing his cleanest grandad shirt and putting on a brown corduroy jacket he’d picked up at Portobello market. He even polished his shoes.

Sirius had offered to come with him, but Remus preferred to go alone. It was easiest if he had time to process his interactions with Hope in private, which he hoped Sirius understood. Anyway. No one wanted to be stuck sitting in a building full of dying people two days before Christmas.

The Hospice itself was on the other side of Cardiff. It didn’t feel much different from the hospital, except that the rooms were private, and furnished with a bit more care. She had fresh flowers every day now, which was nice. Remus brought a poinsettia, because Lily had told him they were christmassy, and Hope was no longer eating solid food, so chocolates were out.

Someone had wound gold and silver tinsel around her bedframe, and blu-tacked christmas cards to the walls. There were so many it looked as though she had special festive wallpaper.

“She said that if you came while she was sleeping, I was to wake her up straight away,” said the cheerful nurse on duty.

“Thanks, I’ll wake her,” he smiled.

His mother lay dozing softly in her big hospital bed. He wondered how tall she was, standing up. Quite small, he imagined - based on the pictures he had of her with Lyall, and how tiny her hands were. He had only ever seen her lying down, and now he realised he might never see her any other way.

He touched her hand, gently, squeezing it with his fingers. Her eyelids fluttered, and she frowned, the pain evident in her face. She turned her head and saw him, and her brow smoothed at once,

“Hello my darling,” she said thickly, as if her mouth was full of cotton wool.

“Merry Christmas, mum.” He said, sitting down.

“*Nadolig llawen*,” she said, in neat earthy Welsh.

“How are you?”

“Better for seeing you,” she smiled. “I’m so glad you’ve come.”

“Of course.” He said, earnestly. “It’s Christmas.”

There had been no talk of his visiting her on Christmas day itself. They’d both skirted around the issue and Remus assumed that she wanted to spend it with her real family.

She asked now, though.

“Where will you be? At home with Sirius?” It was strange to hear her say his name, with her soft rolling r’s.

“At our friend’s parents,” he replied, “The Potters - you met Mrs Potter, once, she told me. Euphemia.”

“I won’t remember,” she shook her head. “I’d invite you here, but it won’t be much fun for you, I’m afraid.”

“Whatever you like, mum.” He said, hoping he didn’t sound disappointed.

“You’ll be happier with your friends.” She said, as if to herself.

“Mr Potter knew Lyall,” Remus prodded a bit harder, wanting to talk about something more substantial. “They worked at the ministry together, and they went to the pub sometimes, and James - their son - he was born in March, same as me--”

“I don’t remember,” Hope said, more forcefully this time. “I’m sorry Remus, I don’t. Lyall kept those things separate. It’s often better that way, you’ll learn.”

He thought about this. Thought about how little he’d known about his parents for most of his life, and how little he’d known about himself as a result. He thought about Sirius, and how they always fought because Remus wasn’t open enough. How much it hurt other people to keep secrets, even when you were trying to protect them.

“I don’t agree.” He said, simply. “I don’t think it’s good to hide things all the time.”

“Well.” Hope said. She looked away, and withdrew her hand from his.

Remus realised that she was annoyed with him. It was an odd sensation, and a first for their relationship. He wasn’t sure how to react. If he’d known her all his life, then he would know what to do; it would be old hat, bickering with your mum. His temper rose the more he thought about it - this was all her fault, his stupid stunted emotions, his complete inability to be comfortable with other people, and here she was, avoiding him.

He wanted her attention, and he only knew one way to get it.

“Mrs Potter - James’s mum - she’s great.” He said, “She makes the best mince pies ever, and a full Christmas dinner, *and* she always gets me a present, even though I’m not her kid.”

Hope pursed her lips, but still didn’t look up.

“That sounds nice.” She said in a small, tight voice.

Remus ploughed on,

“Yeah, James is really lucky. I’d never even had a proper Christmas until I went to the Potters.”

“Yes you did!”

She looked up at him, suddenly, and he saw his own anger reflected back in her eyes.

“You did!” She said, “We had lovely Christmases when you were little!” She was staring at him as if he was mad, as if he was the one who was ill, not her,

“Don’t you remember the tree with the gold angel, and the nativity set? I thought you’d swallowed

baby Jesus one year, but you had him under your pillow, because I'd told you about nasty old king Herod and you wanted to keep him safe - you were so sweet. And we bought you that hobby horse, and the farm set - you loved the farm set, the little pink piglets, I was forever finding them in the garden. And the hand puppets, and the army tank - remember your tank? I told Lyall you were too young, you were a sensitive boy, I didn't like you playing wars, but you loved it, and daddy used to make it move with his magic, and you'd chatter away together for hours..."

She trailed off, clearly upset. Remus gawped at her,

"I don't remember any of that, mum." He said. He search for her hand again, and squeezed it. "I wish I did, though. It sounds nice."

"I think about you every year." She said, tearfully, voice shaking, "Every night I used to light the advent candle and think about you, Remus, and I'd talk about you... I'd tell Siân about you, too."

He snapped to attention. She was watching him warily, as though afraid he might lash out. Aware of this, he kept his voice even,

"Could you tell me a bit about Siân?"

Hope gnawed her lip. She looked so exhausted from the pain and the drugs and fucking cancer, he was starting to feel guilty. But they were almost out of time.

"She's eight," she said, finally. "She'll be nine in February."

"And she's your daughter with... with Gethin?" Remus asked, feeling as though all of the air had left the room

Hope nodded, closing her eyes. Tears spilled out under her lashes, streaming down her cheeks.

"I never re-married - not after Lyall. But I fell in love. I had my Siân."

"Only Siân?"

She nodded again. Remus frowned,

"When I first came to see you, the nurse said you were always talking about your kids - I thought you had more than one."

"I do," she looked at him, puzzled, blinking through tears, "You and Siân."

"Oh." He felt dreadful. All this time he'd thought he was one of Hope's terrible secrets.

"I've never been ashamed." She said, a note of defiance entering her voice. "Not of my lovely boy. Never."

"Mum..." he felt as though he'd been punched in the gut. He was crying too, all of a sudden, and he squeezed her hand desperately.

"Come here," she reached out for him, and he got up to sit carefully on the edge of the bed, leaning over so that she could wrap her arms around him. He rested his head on her shoulder, trying not to put too much weight on her frail body, but she was stronger than he gave her credit for, and held him tightly.

"I'm sorry, mum," he said, his words muffled by her soft nightgown. She smelled of talcum powder and lavender, and family. She stroked his hair,

“You’ve nothing to be sorry for, sweetheart. I love you.”

“I love you too,” he wept.

I've looked at clouds from both sides now

From up and down, and still somehow

It's cloud illusions I recall

I really don't know clouds at all

* * *

Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels

The dizzy dancing way you feel

As every fairy tale comes real

I've looked at love that way

But now it's just another show

You leave 'em laughing when you go

And if you care, don't let them know

Don't give yourself away

He stayed at the Hospice for longer than usual, and by the time he had apparated to the Potter’s front gate, he was exhausted. He felt like laundry that had been wrung out and splayed on a clothesline, weak and bare and empty.

James had to question him at the door - it was second nature now.

“Which film did we see in the summer of 1974?”

“The Great Gatsby.” He replied, grimly.

James saw the look on his face and stepped aside at once.

“All right, Moony?” he asked, putting a hand on Remus’s shoulder.

“Yeah,” Remus nodded, hoping he just looked tired, “I don’t want to be rude, but would it be all right if I just went to bed? Um. Tell your parents I’m really sorry, I’m just...”

“Yeah, of course, mate!” James said eagerly, “You go up, I’ll tell ‘em you’re knackered.”

“Thank you.” Remus smiled. He climbed the familiar stairs to bed. He really hoped Mrs Potter wouldn’t mind - he’d be fine in the morning, but just now he wasn’t sure if his nerves could handle seeing her. She always hugged him, too, and being hugged by one mother today was about as much as he could take.

Of course, it wasn’t long before Sirius poked his head around the bedroom door.

“I’ll leave you be, if you want,” he said, carrying in a tray loaded with cheese, pickle, ham, crackers and of course Mrs Potter’s famous mince pies. “I just thought you might be peckish?”

“I’m starving,” Remus grinned at him, “Thank you.”

Looking very pleased with himself, Sirius crossed the room more confidently, and set the tray down on the bed between them. They sat quietly for a while, cross legged on the duvet cover, Remus eating, Sirius pretending not to watch him. When he was finished, Sirius took the tray away, and Remus lay down, stretching out his aching limbs.

“Shall I go?” Sirius asked.

“No.” Remus said. “Just... don’t expect too much, ok?”

“Ok.” He lay down next to Remus, on his back.

“How’s the hangover?” Remus asked, remembering the state they’d all been in that morning.

“Fine,” Sirius snorted, “Evans and her potions.”

“Great.”

Remus closed his eyes, letting the events of the day settle in his mind. It was good to have Sirius there, he decided. Being alone might be really awful. If only there was a way to express that without having it come out wrong.

“I’ve got a sister.” He said, finally. “She’s eight.”

“Wow.”

“Mm.” He reached for Sirius’s hand and held it. “It took her months to tell me. God knows what else I don’t know. I wish we had more time together.”

Sirius squeezed his hand sympathetically. Remus licked his lips, steeling himself for the next bit. “I wish we had more time, but I also... I also wish she would be more open. It really hurts, knowing that there are parts of her she keeps private.”

“Oh?” Sirius was doing an excellent job of keeping his cool. If Remus hadn’t been so sad it would be comical.

“Yeah.” He said. He turned to look at Sirius. Sirius turned to look back at him. “So I’m sorry,” Remus said, nervously, “If I ever make you feel that way.”

“Moony--”

“--It’s just that I get worried,” Remus said quickly, “That you won’t... if you knew some things...”

“There’s nothing you could tell me that would change how I feel.” Sirius said.

Remus was speechless at that. But it was a good feeling. A happy feeling, even considering the circumstances. He couldn’t look at Sirius any more so he rolled onto his side. Luckily, Sirius seemed to understand and followed suit, draping an arm across Remus’s body. Remus breathed in slowly.

“That mission I did, back in the summer? It went really badly.” He said, feeling the weight already lifting.

“I thought something had happened.” Sirius said. “Go on.”

“I... do you remember how I got, the last time there were werewolves nearby? Like... really pushy and sort of not thinking? That happened again. No one got hurt, but I’m pretty sure Danny thinks I’m dangerously mad now.”

“It didn’t happen to him?”

“I think he must have felt it. But we reacted differently. I sort of - took charge. Not on purpose, it just felt natural at the time.”

“That makes sense,” Sirius said, “That’s what you do on full moons, we have to let you be the leader.”

“Yeah, I hadn’t thought of it like that.”

“So... if no one got hurt, what happened?”

“One of the werewolves tried to attack me, but I overpowered him.” Remus said, “I was supposed to get information, but all I did was rile them up.”

“What did Moody say about it?”

“He was... cryptic. I don’t think he was angry. He asked me if I minded going alone next time - without Danny. But he hasn’t sent me on any other missions, not proper ones, and it’s been months...”

“They have to be saving you for something.” Sirius said, “I know they have to be - James keeps telling Frank and Alice how good you are at defensive magic, and they just say they can’t do anything without an order from someone above them.”

“Maybe.” Remus sighed.

“Did he really say you had to go alone next time?”

“He didn’t say I *had* to... just asked if I minded. And I don’t think there’s any other way - Danny won’t work with me again, he was too scared. So I suppose... yeah, it’ll be just me next time.”

Sirius’s arms tightened around Remus.

“I hate that.”

Remus didn’t have a response, and Sirius didn’t seem to be looking for one, so they just lay like that quietly for a while, until Remus fell asleep.

* * *

Boxing Day 1978

As Lily had predicted, Christmas Day 1978 was a welcome break from everyone's troubles. In fact - perhaps because it had been a particularly difficult year - Remus always remembered that Christmas as one of the most pleasant and happy they had together.

Mr and Mrs Potter were slowing down a bit - Euphemia said she wasn't up to hosting a big party as she usually did, and anyway, the Ministry had warned against large social gatherings. Mr Potter had to be locked out of his study - James and Sirius stole the key - but he saw the funny side, and joined in with the festivities whole-heartedly.

Remus noticed that this year it was really James and Lily who were the hosts. She co-ordinated most of the cooking, the decorating, the card writing; while he made sure that everyone always had a drink, that all of the usual christmas games were played, and that the house was full of joy at all times.

As for presents, it was all of the usual fare - sweets and nuts and candied fruit, new socks and underwear, a pair of pyjamas from Lily as a joke ("so I stop catching you in your knickers!"), and a shiny new pair of doc martens from Sirius.

Surprisingly, Remus also received a gift from Grant, that year, and felt guilty for not getting him one in return. He laughed when he opened it - a filofax organiser. Grant had written his own address and phone number in the first page, and in the back where the notes had written the heading: "*New Year's Resolutions: 1. Stop and smell the roses .*"

Christmas Day over and done with, James and Lily were heading to the Evans's for Boxing Day (James was absolutely dreading it, having met Lily's sister twice already, and failed to impress her either time.) So Sirius and Remus went back to their own home to settle in and get ready for the New Year. Sirius rather liked the idea of hosting his own party, and Remus was prepared to give in, as long as they only invited people they knew.

"How many do you reckon we can fit in this flat anyway?" Remus asked as they opened the door. "It's not like we've got a ballroom, there's only one sofa!"

"We ought to knock through the kitchen, have it all open plan," Sirius replied, as they walked in. The phone was ringing, and he went to answer it. "Hello?" He frowned, then held out the phone to Remus, "For you, I think?"

Remus took the receiver from him. Of *course* it was for him - Sirius didn't know anyone who could use a telephone.

"Hello?"

"Hullo? Is that Remus Lupin?" It was a man with a deep voice and a broad Welsh accent. Remus's insides went cold, and he sat down on the arm of the couch, steadying himself.

"Yes, that's right..."

"Ah, good. Ah. My name's Gethin Rees."

Remus swallowed, and found his throat dry.

"Is she... She's gone, isn't she?"

There was a long quiet on the other end of the phone, and Remus began to cry. Finally, Gethin

spoke, his own voice sounding very rough.

“I’m sorry, lad. Funeral’s next Wednesday.”

I've looked at love from both sides now

From give and take, and still somehow

It's love's illusions I recall

I really don't know love at all

* * *

Tears and fears and feeling proud

To say "I love you" right out loud

Dreams and schemes and circus crowds

I've looked at life that way

But now old friends are acting strange

They shake their heads, they say I've changed

Well something's lost, but something's gained

In living every day.

Wednesday 3rd January 1979

Remus sighed, staring out of their bedroom window watching the raindrops sliding down the glass. When he was a little boy and it rained, he would sit on the biggest windowsill he could find at St Edmunds and pick two droplets, then pretend they were racing to the bottom of the pane. An idea he’d got from a poem; maybe one Hope had read him, which he’d forgotten now.

It always rained at funerals in films. That was called ‘pathetic fallacy’, Remus had read about it in an old A-level English textbook. Of course, if you had a funeral in Wales in January, the chances of rain were extremely high, too. It was a strange thing to be glad about, but it seemed proper. A sunny day would have been intolerable.

“Ready?” Sirius asked, very gently, entering the room.

Remus looked up at him, feeling numb, and nodded. Sirius looked gorgeous in a black suit, his hair tied back. Remus felt scruffy, though they were dressed identically, Sirius just wore clothes better. Remus had wanted to cut his hair short, to make it look tidier, but he’d been convinced not to, in the end. Still, the urge to do something drastic was there.

“Take your time,” Sirius said, “We’ve got an hour or so.”

Remus nodded again. The service was supposed to start at eleven, but Gethin had said that if he wanted to come earlier and greet the mourners, then he was welcome to. Remus still wasn't sure.

Sirius closed the bedroom door, and came to sit next to him. He held his hand, and stared out of the window too.

"Have you ever been to a funeral before?" Remus asked, finally.

"Uncle Alphard's," Sirius replied, "I was only little, though. Nine or ten. Don't remember it. I've never... lost anyone close."

"Mm." Remus inclined his head, still watching the raindrops against the grey sky, "I don't know if I knew Hope all that well. I didn't even know her for a whole year."

"I don't think that matters."

"Nor do I." Remus bowed his head.

He wasn't going to cry again, he didn't think he could. It had felt good at first, a big rush of emotion. But since then, nothing. Just a blankness, and empty feeling he hadn't had before.

Sirius gripped his hand again.

"I'll be with you the whole time."

Remus looked at him and smiled weakly.

"Thank you. Ok, I think I'm ready." He stood up, finally whirring into action. "Oh shit!" He said, slapping his forehead, "The flowers! Padfoot, I forgot to pick up the bloody flowers!"

Sirius put a hand on his shoulder,

"I got Wormtail to do it, he's got them. And Lily's got the address for the church, so we don't get lost - Prongs has the food for the wake, his mum sent along some pork pies and sausage rolls, and I've got the umbrellas sorted. All you need to do is apparate, everything else is taken care of, all right?"

Overwhelmed, Remus grabbed him and hugged him tightly.

"Thank you," he said.

Sirius hugged him back,

"Anything for our Moony, eh?"

Remus smiled, breathing in Sirius's hair, his scent, letting it anchor him. The words popped into his head almost out of nowhere, and finally, *finally*, it was easy to say.

"Sirius?" He whispered, still holding on.

"Yeah?"

"Love you."

Sirius kissed his cheek, huffing a soft laugh, which sounded like relief.

“Love you too.”

They walked into the living room hand in hand. James and Peter were also in suits, and Lily in a simple black dress, her usually vibrant hair neatly tied back in a bun. She was carrying an enormous bouquet of flowers. They all gave Remus cautious, sympathetic smiles, which he was getting used to now. He nodded back at them all, gratefully.

“Right.” Sirius said, taking charge, “Let’s do this.”

It was a small village church, just outside of Hope’s hometown - it was where she had been christened, and if she had married a muggle, it was where the wedding would have been. Remus knew from their brief conversations that Hope had not been particularly religious, but that her family belonged to the Church in Wales, so she went along for tradition’s sake.

It was a very pretty building - or at least it would have been, if it wasn’t raining so hard. Soft grey granite, with a bell tower and a pointed steeple, simple but pretty stained glass windows. Like a church in a picture book. The graveyard was full of ancient tombstones and stone crosses, but Hope would be cremated, as per her wishes.

The marauders and Lily approached slowly, walking up the sodden pathway to join the cluster of mourners gathered in the doorway. Remus spotted Gethin straight away, standing just inside the porch, shaking hands with each attendee as they entered. He was a tall man, like Lyall, but not as spindly. He had dark hair, thick black eyebrows and rather a weak chin. He looked completely broken, and Remus was instantly less nervous about meeting him.

Lily, James and Peter hung back, looking for somewhere to put all the food they’d brought for the wake, which was supposed to be in the church hall around the back. Remus and Sirius silently waited their turn to go in.

“Hullo,” Gethin said, barely looking up as Remus approached, “Thank you for coming...”

“I’m Remus.” Remus said, shaking the proffered hand. Gethin looked up at once, blinking. They were about eye-level.

“Remus.” Gethin shook his hand weakly, his dark eyes raking Remus over. “Hope talked about you all the time. It’s a shame we’re meeting like this.”

“Yes.” Remus nodded.

They stood awkwardly for a while, just looking at each other, before Gethin came to his senses, “Go in,” he said, gesturing, “Your mum was keen on you sitting in the front row, but it’s up to you...”

“Thanks,” Remus nodded again.

“See you after, eh?” Gethin patted his shoulder.

“Yeah. Good,” Remus said, aware that he was speaking in single-syllables.

In the end, Sirius had to nudge him into the church, as he seemed to have forgotten how to move. They made their way slowly to the front, and sat down. Remus could hear people whispering about him; a few of them knew who he was, and the reaction was mixed. He ignored it. He was there for Hope, and no one else.

The service itself was a blur, and he barely listened. He just stared at the eagle shaped lectern and

tried to conjure up a decent memory of his mother.

They didn't sing a hymn, they played a Joni Mitchell song instead. Hope had never mentioned Joni Mitchell to Remus, but he supposed it must have meant something to her. That was a painful thought. They'd had so little time. It wasn't fair.

Siân was there, of course. Remus recognised her at once - she was the only child present. She was dressed in a cream coloured frock with a black satin sash, and kept her head buried in the lap of an old woman Remus didn't know - he assumed that was Gethin's mother, Siân's grandmother. She cried all the way through, and for some reason that was comforting to Remus. Hope must have been a wonderful mother.

Afterwards, Remus's legs felt like lead; he was rooted to the spot. He didn't get up with the rest of the family to walk out (there was no coffin to follow - her body was already at the crematorium, apparently), but waited behind for the church to clear. Sirius waited with him.

When the church was all but empty, Sirius whispered,

"You ok?"

Remus nodded.

Sirius touched his knee lightly, but no more than that. "That was really sad. It's ok if you're tired and want to go home?"

"No, it's fine." Remus shook his head, "I ought to go. I told Gethin I would. Just. Five more minutes?"

They had to leave eventually, the caretaker wanted to tidy up.

The church hall was very small, and crammed full of people and people's emotions. Some of them were laughing, reminiscing. Others were still red-nosed and sombre. It was a drab little room, which needed refurbishing; the wooden floorboards were splintering in places, there were notice boards dedicated to drawings by the children who attended sunday school there, and another one for the local scout troupe.

Three trestle tables were groaning under the weight of the food people had brought - piles of sandwiches, meat pies, crisps, cheese and pineapple skewers, fruit cake, leftover turkey curry, slices of ham and other cold cuts. It was a dry funeral, and an old lady in the corner was serving weak cups of milky tea. For once in his life, Remus was not hungry.

Worst of all, there was a table covered in framed photographs and albums. Most of them were of Hope, and apart from one or two snaps of her as a little girl, not one of them had been taken before 1965. Remus looked at them all, tried to fix the image in his mind - a happy, healthy woman who had always tried to do what was best, even when other people let her down.

"She'd be so glad you came." Gethin appeared beside him. He reached out and stroked the glass on one of the photo frames. Hope's black and white face beamed out at him, static and lifeless.

"I had to." Remus said, quietly. Sirius stood at his other shoulder, ready for anything. Remus looked at Gethin, "I wish I had been there. For... well, to say goodbye."

"It was very quiet, like she was." The older man said. "She was awake on Christmas morning, and went to sleep after lunch. There was no pain."

Remus hadn't thought about her being in pain. He wished Gethin hadn't put that in his head.

"I know what you're thinking," Gethin said, nodding at the photo display, "No pictures of you. It wasn't deliberate - she put them all in a box for me to send to you, only I've lost track of your address..."

"I don't want them." Remus shook his head.

"Remus," Sirius said, softly, "Don't make any decisions yet."

Remus just shrugged.

"There are a few other bits," Gethin said, eyeing Sirius with some confusion, then looking at Remus again, "I'll hang onto them as long as you like."

"Bits?" Remus looked at him blankly.

"Things she wanted you to have," Gethin said. "Not money, or anything--"

"I'm not interested in money!" Remus said, sharply.

Gethin frowned, he looked hurt. His eyes were rimmed red, with dark rings under them, like smudges of coal dust. Remus pursed his lips, and took a step back, shaking his head.

"I'm sorry. I can't be here. I'm sorry." And with that, turned and walked straight out of the hall.

It had stopped raining by now, but the grass was still wet and the scent of delicious earth rising all around. There was a group of old men sitting on some benches outside. They'd loosened their ties and sat slouched, smoking and passing around an illicit flask of something very strong smelling. Remus tutted, disgusted, and kept walking, wanting to get away from everything.

"Remus!" Sirius came jogging up the path to catch him, Lily, James and Peter not far behind.

"I want to go." Remus said.

"You can come back to mum and dad's if you want?" James suggested, "Mum said she'll do us all dinner."

"No," Remus shook his head, he grabbed Sirius arm, and looked at him, imploring, "Please, can we just go back to the flat? Just you and me?"

"Of course we can," Sirius put his own calm hand over Remus's desperate one, and Remus felt his heart begin to steady.

So that was what they did, Remus promising himself that he would apologise to the Potters and his friends another time.

But if he'd been hoping for a respite from the rest of the world, to lock himself away with Sirius and pretend that just for a moment, nothing else mattered, then he was in for a disappointment.

There was an owl sitting on top of the mantelpiece when they got in, with a note tied to its scaly leg.

Remus.

My condolences.

Please meet me at the Auror's Office at 9am on Monday.

A. Moody.

* * *

I've looked at life from both sides now

From win and lose and still somehow

It's life's illusions I recall

I really don't know life at all

Chapter End Notes

Song throughout is 'both sides now' by Joni Mitchell.

The War: Auror Headquarters

Chapter Summary

Remus goes to the ministry.

Chapter Notes

CW Sexual content towards the end of this chapter

Monday 8th January 1979

“Please let me come with you?” Was the last thing Sirius said as Remus left the flat early Monday morning.

“I’ll be fine.” Remus shook his head, trying to give Sirius a reassuring smile. He didn’t say what he was thinking, which was ‘how would that look?!’. It was bad enough he’d been summoned to Moody’s actual office at the ministry; what would he think if Remus brought his boyfriend along for moral support?

Still, Remus had to admit that he had a difficult time leaving their cosy little home that morning. He’d barely left the bedroom since they’d returned from the funeral, let alone got dressed or left the flat. To go to the ministry he had to wear full robes for the first time since school, which helped a little bit - at least he’d be able to blend in.

The visitors entrance for the Ministry of Magic was about twenty minutes’ walk from Soho, and Remus found the early morning stroll more pleasant than he’d expected. It was a crisp, cold January day, and his breath turned white in the winter air. Peter was there to meet him,

“Hiya Moony,” Wormtail smiled up at him, giving him an awkward pat on the arm, “How’re you holding up?”

“Oh, you know.” Remus shrugged. Grief was a funny thing. He never knew if he was doing it right.

“Looking forward to saturday!”

“Yeah, me too.”

The full moon was due on the thirteenth. So far since Hogwarts the marauders had got away with apparating (Peter side-alonged) to the most remote places possible and transforming there. So far they’d been to the Brecon Beacons, the Outer Hebrides, Dartmoor and the Forest of Dean. No one in the Order had brought it up yet, though Remus supposed they all assumed he was registered.

Peter and Remus entered the ministry via a telephone box. Peter needed to be there, because after Remus had stated his business, a small silver visitors badge dropped out of the telephone's change slot. Wormtail picked it up quickly, and muttered the incantation to turn it to tin, before giving it to Remus.

They descended into the ministry atrium, which was heaving with activity. It was an enormous hall, bigger than Gringotts, with rows of fireplaces lining the walls. Green lights flashed intermittently from each hearth as wizards and witches arrived for work.

Peter led Remus through the security stand, where his wand was weighed by a mean spirited wizard with a long beard. Remus was incredibly grateful to have a friend with him, and secretly quite glad it was quiet, genial Peter, rather than Sirius who had a tendency to get a bit overprotective of Remus when it came to the wizarding community.

Next they moved through to another hall with a set of lifts, and entered the nearest one.

"You're on level two," Peter explained chirpily, "I'm with the Floo Network Authority on four. Do you need me to show you where the Auror's office is?"

Remus thought he would quite like Peter's help, if only Peter wasn't so clearly enjoying having the upper hand.

"No," he smiled, "I'll manage. Cheers mate."

Peter gave him a kind smile as he left the lift. Remus nodded back, and the door slid closed.

Soon enough the tannoy announced; "Level two, Department of Magical Law Enforcement; including the Improper Use of Magic Office, Auror Headquarters, and Wizengamot Administration Services."

Remus shuffled his way out of the lift and onto the corridor. The lift doors closed behind him with a 'ping' and Remus stood there for a few moments, blindsided. It was a very busy hallway, wizards and witches striding up and down, some deep in conversation, others hastily scribbling down notes on scraps of parchment - and some of them muttering to themselves. Over his head, purple paper aeroplanes zoomed back and forth, fluttering into the office doors which lined the corridor.

He wished he hadn't been so proud now, and asked Pete to walk him to the right office. There had to be a sign somewhere...

"Lupin!" A loud and familiar voice boomed. Remus turned around with some relief and smiled, seeing Ferox barrelling towards him, hand raised in salutation.

"Hi," he said.

"Lost? Come with me!"

Remus followed Ferox along the hallway, past office after office until they reached an elaborate door with a carved wood frame. *Auror Headquarters*.

"Nervous?" Ferox glanced at him sideways. Remus looked back,

"Is it that obvious?"

Ferox laughed and clapped him on the shoulder,

“I’d be concerned if you weren’t. C’mon now, it’s only Moody.” And he pushed the door open with one big hand, the other still on Remus’s shoulder, as if to stop him from running away.

As a child, Remus had had some experience with muggle law enforcement. Only ever for silly things like running away from the Home, or being caught ‘causing a disturbance’ - which usually meant he was just somewhere public and other people would prefer him not to be. The police were extra rough with you, once they clocked you were a St Edmund’s boy, they’d call you things and shove you in their car, or else give off thinly veiled threats of physical violence if you didn’t do as you were told. As a result, Remus had never felt that comfortable around authority figures, even if he was a poshboy nowadays.

He wasn’t sure exactly how similar the Aurors were to muggle police. He’d only met Moody, Frank and Alice so far. Moody was completely terrifying, but Remus had known him long enough now that he was used to him. Alice and Frank were very nice, very earnest people - but then, they didn’t know what he really was.

The inside of the office was very busy, with rows of desks divided up into cubicles. There were posters of criminals, magically enchanted maps and printed lists on notice boards all around the walls, and memos whizzing back and forth. But the most striking thing about it for Remus was the incredibly concentrated scent of strong magic - and dark magic too.

Ferox, hand still on Remus’s shoulder, steered him towards a desk near the back corner, which had the best vantage point over the rest of the chaotic office.

Moody’s desk and the shelves around it were cluttered with weird and wonderful magical devices; whirring telescopes, glowing crystals, strange humming orbs. Moody himself was bent over a map. Forgetting his nerves, Remus peered over his shoulder to look - he’d never got over his interest in cartography - and Moody barked,

“Never sneak up on an Auror, Lupin.”

Remus jumped back, alarmed, and Moody turned to face him, grinning. His mad eye swivelled sickly in its socket.

“Leo,” Moody reached out and shook hands with Ferox, then with Remus. “Glad to see you’re nice and punctual. Have a seat.”

He gestured at a long velvet covered seat against the wall of his cubicle which hadn’t been there a moment ago. Remus and Ferox sat down as Moody cast a spell which muted the noise around them, creating a bubble of peace around his desk that was not dissimilar to James and Sirius’s silencing charms.

Remus was relieved by the quiet, but Moody’s spell had done nothing to mitigate the overwhelming scent of power which filled his nostrils, swam down his throat and filled up his chest with glorious rich syrupy magic. He tried to relax, to let it find its place in him rather than fighting it, but he felt ever so slightly drunk with it all the same.

“Once again, Lupin,” Moody said gruffly, sitting down in his office chair which looked like a plush green leather armchair, but swivelled on one stem. “I was sorry to hear about your loss. I didn’t know Hope myself, but--”

“That’s ok.” Remus said quickly, “I barely knew her either.”

He was keen to keep his mother out of any conversation he had today. He hadn’t the strength for

two things at once, and if Moody had a mission for him, then that had to be his main concern.

Moody - who was either an excellent legilimens or simply extremely astute and empathetic, nodded manfully and continued.

“Straight to business, then.” He said, “Good chap.” He swivelled slightly in his chair to pick up the map he’d been looking at, and handed it to Remus.

Remus took it eagerly, and looked. It was a map of Britain and Ireland, but not like ones he had seen before - there were no roads marked, no towns or cities, only the woodland areas, rendered in mossy green splodges of ink. Some of these splodges seemed to shimmer and twinkle, as if there were stars hiding beneath the tree branches.

“Got that from the Control of Magical Creatures office,” Moody explained, “Thanks to Ferox here. Know what it is, lad?”

“It’s...” Remus poured over it, “It’s all of the forests with magic in it? Or magical creatures?”

“Exactly.” Moody nodded, looking very pleased with him, “We’ve noticed that most of the werewolf sightings over the past few years have been in enchanted woodland, forests with a denser population of magical creatures. Now, that could just mean they’re keeping their ears to the ground for you-know-who, or that there are other creatures working with them...”

Or because the scent of all that natural magic is just too good to resist, Remus thought, his own blood fizzing like champagne just from the twenty or so powerful wizards nearby. He didn’t say this, of course, for his own sake.

“...and for the last couple of full moons there’s been a lot of activity here,” Moody pointed a stubby, scarred finger at a point on the map, somewhere in the midlands.

“Why are you telling me now?” Remus asked, “If you’ve been following them for months?”

“It’s time.” Moody said, fixing him with a hard stare, one blue eye, one brown. “Greyback’s in the country for the first time since the sixties; it’s been confirmed.”

“Oh.” Remus pursed his lips to quell the rage inside him, rearing up like a cobra, showing its teeth. *Where is he?! Take me to him right now !* “Right.”

“Last time you made contact you came back with some good information,” Moody continued, “Those who want to join Greyback need to transform with the pack three times, that right?”

“Mm.” Remus nodded. He wanted to stand up and pace, or do something physical, but he couldn’t afford for either Ferox or Moody to know that there was anything wrong.

“And the next full moon is on Saturday?”

Remus nodded. He looked at Ferox, then Moody again,

“You want me to go already? To start... to...”

“Just for the moons,” Ferox said, his voice calming, “Just until they trust you.”

“But once they trust me,” Remus said, looking at his hands, “Then... I need to meet him, right?”

“Let’s see how things go.” Moody said, choosing his words carefully. “We’ve three months to plan for that.”

“Ok.”

Remus didn't know what else to say. His head was full and his nerves were raw and he felt almost ready to explode, but for some weird reason he just sat there like a polite schoolboy, listening to Moody lay out the plan.

He was given a lot of rules. He would have to go alone. He could take his wand, but nothing else. He could tell nobody, not even the other members of the order, not even his best friends. Ferox began suggesting things Remus could say or do to get the pack to trust him, but Remus ignored him. He knew what to do.

“I'll walk you out, shall I, Lupin?” Ferox said finally, with a note of paternal kindness.

“Thank you,” Remus said, standing up quickly.

“You're a man of few words, Lupin,” Moody said, standing up too, holding out his hand once more for Remus to shake, “But I've every faith in you. I'll send the coordinates before Saturday. Make sure you're at home to receive them.”

Remus nodded blankly, shaking the proffered hand. Just as he had guided him in, Ferox led Remus back out of the Auror Headquarters.

“Alright there, fella?” Ferox asked, once they were clear of the doors. The corridor was a bit quieter than it had been at nine o'clock.

“Yes. Fine.”

“If there's anything you think you need, if you want me to ask Moody for something that will help, you can just--”

“How will it help?” Remus asked, suddenly, stopping in the middle of the hallway. He twitched his thumb and cast *muffliato*, without any effort at all. Ferox blinked, surprised,

“How will what help?”

“Me, meeting Greyback? I've met three members of his pack now, and it's only made things worse each time.”

“That's not true. You've given us some extremely valuable information.”

“If I have,” Remus said, “Then I want to know what you're using it for.”

“To win the war, Remus.” Ferox shook his head.

“When I met Castor last year,” Remus said, his voice very low, but more out of anger than a desire to be discreet, “He told me in no uncertain terms that they were planning an attack. I told Dumbledore, and what happened? Nothing. The attack went ahead. So I'll ask again. If I'm gathering information for the Order, if I'm risking my life to do it, then I want to know what for. It's obviously not to save lives.”

“Remus, that was an extremely complicated situation--”

“Explain it.”

“We couldn't act, we couldn't let the werewolves know you were telling Dumbledore anything, we had to preserve your connection with them--”

“What?!” Remus stared at him, “People died! People had their whole lives ruined! Because of me?!”

“You can’t think about it that way.”

“How would you think about it?! I trusted him! I thought I was doing the right thing!”

“Remus, calm *down* !”

Remus realised that he couldn’t. He wished he could apparate right then and there, but nothing happened when he tried, so he marched towards the lift instead.

“Don’t follow me.” He growled at Ferox, who held the doors open, stopping him from leaving.

“You need to get your head straight, kid.” Ferox said, very seriously. “This is war. It’s not noble, and it’s not always about saving individual lives. You need to get used to that in time for Saturday.”

“Don’t worry.” Remus turned his head, glaring at the panel of buttons. The doors began to slide shut, grinding loudly as Remus tested his magical strength against Ferox’s physical muscle. “I’ll be ready.”

The doors shut, Ferox snatching his fingers clear at the very last second, and Remus began to move up, back towards the real world.

* * *

Remus had barely stepped out of the visitor-entrance phonebox and he was standing before his own front door - he’d stored all of that leftover magic up like a battery, and he only needed to have the slightest want and the magic did the rest. He remembered the curse Snape had thrown at James, which he’d deflected on the last day of school. It would be a useful skill, if only he could depend on it.

Not only was he full of magic, but his temper had reached boiling point now that he was home. It was a peculiar feeling - similar to the moments before transforming, right before the mind-numbing pain kicked in. A howling, grasping animal longing. God he needed to... he needed...

“Sirius?!” He burst through the door, yelling. No luck, the flat was empty. Remus gave a frustrated growl and kicked the wall, knocking a hole through the plasterboard. “Fuck.” He muttered. *Sirius come here* .

He pressed his palm against the top of the wall and forced some magic out. The hole at the base of the wall closed over at once, thank goodness. It wasn’t enough. He had more; he needed to vent it, a release valve. He pulled off his robes and then his jumper, tossing them onto the couch, pacing the room in his thin t-shirt and trousers. He could go for a run. He could apparate to the Lake District for a few hours and just run around like a madman. He could turn the wall to sponge and start punching it until he’d run out of energy. He could drink himself into oblivion. As long as he did *something* .

“Moony?!”

The front door opened, and there was Sirius.

“You’re here!”

“Yeah, weirdest thing,” Sirius closed the door behind him. He smelled of petrol and motor oil and leather, and Remus felt himself stiffen instantly. *Oh. That would work.* “I was working on the bike up the road, and then... I dunno, I could have sworn I heard your voice. But if you only just got back then it can't have been--”

Remus couldn't take it anymore, he crossed the room in two strides and pushed Sirius up against the door, kissing him hard. Sirius kissed him back, eager to please as always. Remus pressed harder, taking Sirius's lovely white wrists, smeared with oil, holding them and pushing a knee between his legs. He began to kiss down Sirius's neck, next, nipping at the soft flesh there, and Sirius gasped,

“Bloody hell, are you all right?”

“Mmm.” Remus moaned, “Just want to...”

Sirius moved his hip slightly, pressing into Remus's rigid cock - it felt like electricity, and Remus almost lost control altogether, squeezing Sirius's wrists, slamming his eyes shut as he fought to hang on. He wasn't the only one that felt it,

“Fuck,” Sirius panted, helpless in Remus's grip, “Was that you? You feel... what... what's...”

“Magic,” Remus managed to stammer, eyes still closed, rolling his forehead against Sirius shoulder dizzily, “There was so much... I just... um...”

And suddenly it was Sirius who was in control, he'd turned the tables and now he was pulling Remus to the bedroom, and thank god the flat was small, and thank god there was no need anymore for silencing charms or secrecy, because this was simply *not the time*.

“Need you,” Sirius was saying incoherently, pulling off his shirt and then tugging at Remus's, black greasy fingerprints getting everywhere, “Need to feel you everywhere...”

“Yes,” Remus returned, intoxicated, “Yes yes yes...”

Whatever he was feeling, he knew Sirius could feel it too, as he pushed the magic outwards, filling the room with it, igniting every touch.

Remus groaned as their bare skin finally met and Sirius closed his eyes and shuddered. Grasping fingers and gritted teeth. Any sense of concern or shame was obliterated by the heat erupting between them. Remus gave in and thought of nothing else as he selfishly arched and bucked against Sirius, who kept feverishly whispering, “Oh Moony, Moony...” over and over. Their fierce rhythm increased as they began to tense and contract. Gasping as the world exploded, for a few blissful seconds everything went white.

That wasn't enough. They had to go twice more before Sirius was satisfied, and Remus still felt like he could run a marathon.

“If you're planning to visit the Auror's Office again,” Sirius breathed hoarsely, “I'm going to need some warning.”

“Sor--” Remus started, but Sirius clapped a hand over his mouth, grinning,

“Don't you dare apologise. I mean fucking hell.”

Remus laughed, pulling his hand away. He waved a hand at the window lazily, and it slid open, letting cool winter air in.

“Wow,” Sirius raised his eyebrows, “How long does that last?”

“It's going away,” Remus said, closing his eyes. It was; he could feel his heart slowing down, his muscles relaxing. “Last time Snape’s curse drained it, so I s'pose any kind if counter magic works.”

“Well I’d prefer this to cursing you...” Sirius rolled over and stroked Remus’s bare hip.

“Mm.” Remus murmured in agreement, eyes still closed.

“So...” Sirius said, his hand still now, his voice more solemn, “It either went really well or really badly at the ministry...?”

“Both.” Remus flung his arms over his face. “Do we have to talk about it?”

“Yeah I think we do.”

Remus sighed heavily. He sat up, reaching for his cigarettes.

“Greyback’s in England.” He started.

Sirius sat up at once, frowning. He took a cigarette from the box Remus held out, placed it between his lips, lit it, and looked at Remus very seriously.

“Tell me everything.”

And Remus did.

The War: The Pack

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*Once upon a sunshine,
Before the final bell,
I told my story to big boy,
With connections straight from Hell.
His fiddle was his sweetheart,
He was her favourite beau,
And hear me saying was all he playing
Them songs from long ago.
And then I told my story to the cannibal king
He said baby, baby, shake that thing.*

Saturday 13th January 1979

First Moon

“I hate this.” Sirius said, chain smoking.

“I know you do.” Remus replied. He rubbed his temples. He was getting a headache, not uncommon on a full moon.

“I mean I *really* hate this.” Sirius puffed, staring out of the window. He stood there, one arm folded across his narrow waist, other arm crooked at the elbow so that he could hold the cigarette to his lips. He had to keep stretching up on his tiptoes to blow the smoke out of the gap in the window - it was too cold to open it all the way. Every time he reached up, his t-shirt rode up almost to his belly button, displaying soft skin and a line of fine dark hair.

Remus lay on the couch, a cold flannel on his forehead, watching Sirius inhale, stretch, puff. Lovely, lovely creature. How had Remus ever got so lucky?

“It’s bloody mental, sending you on your own. Why can’t I go with you? I could go as Padfoot.”

“No.” Remus sighed, “You still smell human. They’d tear you apart.”

“What if they tear *you* apart?” Sirius turned sharply. He looked distraught, his cheeks were pink, which was incredible for he-of-the-porcelain-complexion.

“Me?” Remus snorted, trying to sound careless, “Greyback’s prodigal son? Not likely.”

“What’s a prodigal son?”

“Oh right, er... just means I’m going to get a warm welcome. Gaius said not to hurt me. Livia called me her brother.”

“Could I come with you for a bit? Just before anyone else shows up?”

“It’s not safe, Padfoot.” Remus said, gently.

Sirius stubbed out his cigarette angrily on the windowsill. Remus wished he’d stop doing that - they would need to repaint it soon - but now was not the time to scold him. “Why don’t you go to the Potters’?” He suggested, “Don’t spend the night here by yourself.”

“I don’t care where I spend the night.” Sirius flung himself into the armchair.

“Well I do,” Remus tutted, “I need to know where to go after the moon’s down.”

“Shit, yeah,” Sirius sat up, sweeping his hair back, “Ok, I’ll go to the Potters - then if you need any patching up Euphemia will be on hand. Fuck, what if you can’t apparate? What if you--”

“I’ll send a patronus.”

“But if you’re not strong enough...”

“I will be.” Remus replied simply. He was going to an enchanted forest, based on the co-ordinates Moody had sent. If there was even half the magic there that there was in the Forbidden Forest, then Remus foresaw no problem getting himself out. Unless someone with equal strength tried to stop him, but he was trying not to think about that.

A faint chiming sound echoed through the walls. They hadn’t met their neighbours properly - only waved shy ‘hellos’ in the hall - but they knew they had a grandfather clock, because it went off every hour and was so loud they could hear it in their living room. It was four o’clock, and the depths of winter, which meant sundown was imminent.

Remus sat up slowly, tossing aside the flannel. His back ached, early pangs telling him the moon was on its way.

“I’d better get going,” he said.

Sirius stared at him, stricken. Remus tutted, getting up. He went over and kissed Sirius’s forehead. “Go to the Potters’. I’ll be fine. Honestly, you go on missions all the time.”

“Not like this! Defensive stuff, guard duty, carrying messages, not...”

“Someone has to do it,” Remus shrugged. “I’d rather it was me.”

He thought of Danny again, and flinched, shaking his head to rid himself of the negative memory. It kept coming up, ever since Remus had learnt the truth about why Danny had been turned. God, the McKinnons had every reason to hate Remus.

He put his shoes on, tying the laces carefully, though he knew he’d only have to take them off again soon. He wore muggle clothes - this had been Ferox’s suggestion. The werewolves had no idea where Remus was living, or how he was living. If Remus could convince them he had been shunned by the wizarding world, then all the better.

They hugged at the door, Remus’s skin already burning up, Sirius clinging to him so tightly Remus

thought he'd have to take him after all.

"I love you." Sirius said into his shoulder. They hadn't said it since Hope's funeral, but Remus had no trouble at all responding instantly,

"I love you too. I'll be fine. I'll see you so soon, I promise."

And then he left, and he apparated, and when Remus opened his eyes he was very much alone.

* * *

He was somewhere in Derbyshire. At least he thought so. It was rapidly growing dark, and the thick forest canopy made it darker still. The night air was very cold and clean, but Remus was already too warm, and began to strip down at once. He was alone, after all, there was no need to be shy. Except he was not alone; not completely. This was definitely a magical forest, he could taste it on the breeze, hear it in the rustling of the wintry tree branches.

The moon began to rise and Remus felt his body start to change. He braced himself against an oak, clawing at the bark with his nails, toes curling in the mouldy leaf litter.

The trees seemed to empathise. The earth rose up to meet him, damp ground cooling his feverish skin, owls and foxes and bats and all the nocturnal creatures of the woodland crying out as he screamed and his skin burst open and his bones cracked and his teeth sharpened, until he was no longer Remus, and he howled along with them.

The wolf snarled, whipping its tail. It did not know where it was, or why it was alone. Where were the others? Where was the black one? It sniffed the air, sensing something nearby. It threw back its head and howled once more, singing to the moon.

*For the first time in its life, the wolf did not sing alone. A cacophony of beautiful voices joined in, answering, and he ran towards them at full pelt. With every beat of its wolfish heart it panted; **home, home home. I am home.***

* * *

Sunday 14th January 1979

Coughing and spluttering, Remus returned to his senses. He came back piece by piece, confused and sore and exhausted. He opened his eyes and squinted at the cold yellow morning sun flashing at him through bare branches. All around him, the sounds of others waking up, some broken sobs, rough gasps, and female laughter. Their scent was so delicious, so safe and so comforting.

Remus propped himself up on his elbows, dead leaves sticking to his mushroom-clammy skin. He had a long claw mark along his right thigh, three stripes oozing blood. Around him, six or seven others lay naked on the forest floor, slowly coming awake.

"Brother!" A familiar cackle sounded out.

Remus twisted around to see Livia crawling towards him on all fours, her hips swaying, a deranged grin on her face. In the daylight her tattoos looked like animal markings; they covered every inch of her scrawny body in great sweeping spirals, "I knew you would come!"

She knelt at his feet, and he tried to draw his knees up away from her, but she shot out a hand and grabbed his ankle. "You were beautiful, Remus Lupin, beautiful," she purred, leaning forward, her hand moving up his leg,

“Get off me, Livia,” he growled, trying to kick at her - but she held him fast.

“Shhh,” She said playfully, leaning over even further, her hand moving ever closer, “Just relax my love, my darling brother...”

She stretched out her hand and ran three splayed fingers down the cuts on his leg. It felt weird. His whole body seemed to tingle and quiver, he felt warm and - worryingly - on the verge of arousal. He did pull away then, scuttling backwards on all fours like a crab. Livia laughed at him, holding up her three bloody fingertips, then sucking them into her mouth one by one, grinning and murmuring with pleasure.

Disturbed, he stood up quickly, finding that whatever Livia had done, it had healed the wound. He was left only with a silvery scar.

The others were up too, and closing in on him, walking towards Remus through the trees, eyes burning with curiosity, sniffing at the air. Some of them were cut or scratched, but they each healed each other, just by touching and channeling the natural magic which surrounded them. Many of them had shaved heads and the beginnings of the same tattoos Livia had. Others were perhaps more recent initiants, and had longer hair, clear skin.

Remus wanted to summon his clothes, and ideally his wand too, but it seemed a bit rude when everyone else was starkers too. Besides, he wasn't cold, at least not yet. He wasn't frightened, either, which seemed strange. He looked around at the other faces. Still that voice deep within him said; *pack , pack , home .*

“Gaius,” Livia said, suddenly, standing up. Gaius was at her side in an instant. He smiled at Remus, licking his lips,

“Welcome, brother.”

“Welcome, brother!” The others echoed, one after the other, like a peel of bells. Remus felt a surge of adrenaline, of strong, undeniable connection.

“We're so glad you could join us,” Gaius said. Livia turned to him, and began to lick his wounds, as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Castor was there too, but he hung back. Since Remus had last met him, Castor had received a wound which slashed his face, a long split across the nose. It was healed over, but it ruined his once beautiful face.

Remus remembered himself, and found his voice,

“I've had enough,” he said, raising his chin. “I've had enough of the humans, I want to see what else there is.”

Gaius's grin widened, and Livia looked up too, blood on her lips and teeth.

“Our father will be so pleased,” they said in unison,

“So pleased!” Repeated the group.

“I want to meet him,” Remus said, “Will you tell him that?”

“In time, Remus Lupin.” Livia and Gaius said.

“In time...”

Something was happening, though, the pack was retreating. They walked away, back into the trees, the brush, fading into the landscape like the predators they were. Remus felt a tug in his chest. He wanted to follow them; he didn't want to lose their company yet.

“Where are you going?” He asked Livia, as she too began to back away.

“We will see you next month, Remus Lupin,” she said, her face softening somewhat - she looked almost kind, if you ignored the blood drying in the corners of her mouth, “It is not long to wait.”

“But I...”

They both turned, and did not look back.

Now Remus started feeling cold. The chill seemed to begin inside him and work its way out. He felt a horrible empty loneliness that hadn't been there before. Their scent was gone, their familiarity, the safety they represented. *Jesus Christ, Moony*, he hissed at himself, *Sort yourself out, you're not **really** one of them!*

He summoned his clothes quickly, and held his wand tight. It felt weird; somehow vestigial. Much easier to simply summon the strength in his own body, at his very fingertips, no need for a silly stick. He frowned. He did not feel himself. Best to apparate back to the Potters' quickly, before he turned completely feral.

He apparated to the back door, and knocked weakly on the glass of the french windows. He felt much more tired by then; perhaps the effort of apparition, or just being away from the forest and back in mundanity. Mrs Potter was already in the kitchen, and came over at once, opening the doors.

She beamed at him with creased and wrinkled eyes,

“Remus, dear,” she said, her voice very quiet - the others must still be sleeping. “I'd better ask you something... let me see... oh, I'm no good at this... ah; where did you and the boys go on holiday before your seventh year?”

“Cornwall,” Remus replied promptly, grateful to be reminded of that wonderful summer, “Near Truro.”

“Lovely,” she opened the door. “Now, are you all right? Anything hurt?”

“No, I'm fine,” he said, stepping into the kitchen, extending his arms as if to prove his good health to her. Oh god, now he was in the house he could smell Sirius, and everything in him wanted to seek him out at once.

“Lovely,” Mrs Potter smiled, tiredly. “Well then, I think I'll go back to bed, it's hours until breakfast. The boys are sleeping, Sirius is in his room, but if you wanted a bit of peace and quiet I've made up the spare bed too.”

“Thanks, Mrs Potter!” Remus said, practically running up the stairs to the bedroom Sirius was in. He remembered himself just before slamming the door open, and instead pushed it gently, peering inside.

It was quite dark, the heavy curtains drawn over the early sunrise. “Are you awake?” he whispered - redundantly, because he knew that he was.

“Moony!” Sirius sat up immediately.

Remus hurried over to the bed, hanging back at the last moment, because no, he wasn’t a wolf now; he was human and he had to act it.

“Are you ok?!”

“Yes,” he nodded emphatically, “It was fine, it was nothing. We just hunted.”

“Hunted?!” Sirius’s eyes widened.

“Rabbits.” Remus clarified. He could still taste the gamey flesh between his teeth. His stomach flipped and he grew warm once more, “Honestly, it was fine. Easy.”

“I was so worried about you, I didn’t even sleep... don’t you want to get in?” He pulled back the covers.

“Er...” Remus shifted, still standing, “I’m a bit... on edge.”

Sirius frowned, confused. Remus cleared his throat,

“You know. Like the other day?”

“Oh!” Sirius reached out and touched Remus’s arm lightly. He bit his lip, shivering delightfully, getting a taste of the same feeling. “So you are. Um...”

He reached out and put his hands on Remus’s hips, curling his fingers in under the waistband of his jeans, Sirius tugged him towards him, “That’s ok, I can sleep later...”

They did sleep later, both of them, and thankfully James and Lily and the Potters left them undisturbed. When they woke up at five o’clock in the evening, Remus felt like the worst guest in the world, though of course Sirius was perfectly at home.

Remus tried to explain the night’s events to Sirius, but there were things he couldn’t help glossing over. Livia healing him in that intimate way. The desire he’d had to stay, to follow them. It wasn’t lying. He was being as honest as he thought was safe.

Later, he told Moody and Ferox an even more censored version. They didn’t ask for much detail, to be fair, and Remus didn’t see why he should give them everything. He was keen to keep the other werewolves’ identities private for as long as he realistically could, and for now they were only interested in Greyback.

As for Remus, he was the closest he had ever been to the thing he had wanted ever since he was a child. He was going to meet the man who destroyed his life. And he was going to kill him.

* * *

Sunday 11th February 1979

Second Moon

In the intervening month, Remus tried to retain a semblance of normality. He attended meetings and met his friends - often he would go and see the girls on their lunch break; Lily and Marlene at St Mungo’s, Mary only a short bus trip away in Kensington. He phoned Grant if Sirius was away

and he got lonely, and he listened to records and he read books.

But he couldn't ignore how different he felt. Sometimes it caught him off guard; a memory would come to him, or a scent, and his toes curled and he licked his teeth. His dreams became almost exclusively about forests and howling and cool soft moonlight.

He was better prepared, the second time. Just as nervous, though. He apparated to the same spot as before, in case they came to meet him - but they didn't and he transformed alone.

The wolf found its pack even faster this time. They keened and yapped in greeting, the alpha bitch nipped his ear and rubbed herself against him, the younger wolves ducked their heads in submission. Then the hunt began. The wolf could not remember ever having felt such uncomplicated joy before, even with its other pack. The rage and the fear and the hunger slipped away with the wind in its fur, the scent of the herd they stalked.

When they finally caught up to the deer, Remus, Gaius, Livia and Castor were the first in; they took down the stag. The others followed suit, closing in on the struggling beast. The wolf leapt and dug in its claws, relishing the panicked heartbeat of its prey. It sank in its teeth and tore away flesh, and hot rich blood slid down its throat.

When Remus woke up, he was not hungry.

He allowed Livia to lick his wounds clean this time, too doozy and satisfied to think too hard about any of the implications.

"Will I meet Greyback next month?" He asked, before Castor and Livia could melt back into the shadows.

"Our father is looking forward to meeting you Remus Lupin," Livia said, "You must be a little more patient, my brother."

"Have I proved myself?"

"It is not for us to decide."

He stayed in the forest longer than usual - perhaps just out of laziness. Even alone, he felt better there than he had anywhere else. He would have liked to curl up and sleep beneath the trees. When Remus finally reappeared outside the Potters' back door, it was the middle of breakfast.

Lily, James and Sirius were there, faces anxious and drawn, nursing large cups of milky tea. Mrs Potter was standing at the window peering out, and jumped when Remus arrived. She swung the door open.

"There you are!"

"Sorry," he murmured, a bit wobbly on his feet.

"Oh my god, Moony, are you ok?!" Lily was at the door now too, and she pointed at him, horrified. He looked down and saw the blood - it had trickled down his chin and neck, pooling in the hollow above his collar bones, and dried there without his even noticing.

"Shit," he rubbed at his mouth self consciously, "It's not mine, it's not--"

James came to the door next, and Remus suddenly felt very queasy, covered in stag's blood, having feasted on deer only hours before. He stuck out an arm to lean against the wall, giddily.

“Come on, Moony,” Sirius ducked between James and Lily and touched Remus’s hand lightly, “Let’s get you cleaned up...”

Gratefully, Remus allowed himself to be led upstairs to the bathroom. Sirius ran a warm bath, and then stood leaning against the sink while Remus soaked himself, blinking dazedly at the rust coloured swirls in the warm water.

“It’s not human,” he said, shakily.

“I know,” Sirius said, “It’s deer, I can smell it.”

“You can?” Remus looked up at him. Sirius wrinkled his nose,

“I have to concentrate, but yeah. I was talking to Prongs about it, the longer we’re animagi the more weird things we notice. Hope I don’t go colour blind next, eh?”

Remus tried to laugh at this attempt to alleviate the tension, but he was too shaken up.

“Was it bad?” Sirius asked, gently, lowering his voice as if Remus was an invalid.

No, Remus thought to himself. *It was wonderful. I was happy; I was normal.* He was disgusted with himself. *What’s happening to me?*

He looked at Sirius and nodded. “Yeah. It was bad.”

* * *

Tuesday 13th March 1979

Third Moon

“I don’t want to go back to the Potters’ this time.” Remus said, before he had to leave for the third moon with the pack.

“What?” Sirius came out of the kitchen, where he’d been doing the washing up. He was becoming steadily more house proud - or maybe it was just nervous energy; the war was hotting up for everyone, not just Remus.

He was wearing a pair of bright yellow marigolds, which Remus had bought him as a joke, but he loved so much he wore every time. They were wet and shining, dripping suds on the carpet.

“I said I don’t want to go back to the Potters’.” Remus repeated, “In the morning. You can stay there, obviously, but I... I just won’t, ok? I don’t know how safe it is, I don’t want anyone to follow me.”

“We’ve been fine so far...”

Sirius had been doing that a lot; saying ‘we’ when it was really only about Remus.

“I think we’ve been careless.” Remus shrugged. “I won’t put them in danger again.”

“Ok.” Sirius nodded. He peeled off the gloves slowly, “Where do you want to go, then?”

“I don’t know. I thought maybe Cornwall? That castle ruin we visited, do you remember?”

“Of course I remember. Shall I meet you there?”

“Wait for my signal. I want it to be safe.” Remus shifted from foot to foot. He wanted to pace; his back was aching again and he needed to go soon, but he kept still in case it worried Sirius.

“Moony, if it’s not safe then I’d *rather* be there so I can help. I know Prongs and Wormtail and Evans will too--”

“No.” Remus raised his voice. “No, please.”

“But Moony---”

“Look, I have to go.” He practically flew out of the door; he didn’t even put his coat on.

He hadn’t said a proper goodbye. He hadn’t even said ‘I love you’, which they had been doing every time they were separated, just in case. But of course Remus thought he was coming back. He couldn’t have known what the pack had planned.

* * *

This time it was a relief to shed his human form and give up responsibility for a few hours. They ran and played and fought and howled through the night, rustling fairies up from the underbrush, following scents they picked up.

As the moon began to fade, the wolf slowed down, started to whimper as it felt its body shrinking back to pathetic human form. The others stopped too, and drew in close.

Livia was the first to pounce, and Remus, half wolf, half man by this point, tried to struggle but she held him fast, her paws becoming claw-like hands. Castor and Gaius had him too, pinning him down as Remus groaned and clenched his teeth through the pains of transformation.

And then he was human once more, pressed into the ground by the pack, braced against their tangle of strong, hot limbs. He raised his head, yelling,

“What are you doing?! Let me go!”

Livia laughed, astride him, throwing her head back, and then it happened. That weird sucking, squeezing sensation as all four of them apparated, Remus helpless to do anything but cling on and pray he didn’t get splinched.

Suddenly the ground beneath him was hard, cold stone, rocks digging into his bare back. The others finally got off him, and he scrambled to his feet, staring around wildly. They were indoors, in a high ceilinged chamber, like a - was it a *church* ?! It was cold, and it reeked of the pack, and ancient magic. The others stood around him, smiling madly.

“Where the fuck am--” Remus started, but stopped short as Livia stepped to one side and a tall, dark figure approached. Remus knew that scent, he knew those burning yellow eyes. He froze, paralysed by terror. Greyback stepped towards him, teeth bared in a cruel smile.

“Welcome home, cub.”

Song at the beginning is 'Shake that Thing' by The Sensational Alexander Harvey Band

'Marigolds' are those bright yellow rubber gloves you wear when washing up. Not sure if that's just a UK name for them or what.

The War: Captive

Chapter Summary

CW for some unpleasant childhood flashbacks, and obviously Remus is now in Greyback's clutches, so not a lot of fun stuff here.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

As they pulled you out of the oxygen tent

You asked for the latest party.

With your silicone hump and your ten-inch stump

Dressed like a priest you was; Todd Browning freak you was.

Crawling down the alley on your hands and knees

I'm sure you're not protected for it's plain to see,

The diamond dogs are poachers and they hide behind trees.

Hunt you to the ground, they will,

Mannequins with kill appeal.

Wednesday 14th March 1979

"Welcome home, cub."

Remus said nothing. For now, he had nothing to say. He just wanted to get a good look.

Fenrir Greyback. Remus had expected him to be taller. He wasn't short by any standards, but when Remus stood up straight they were eye level. That was good. That gave him a flutter of courage.

He may not be taller than Remus, but Greyback was certainly bigger in every other way; hulking broad shoulders, thick squat neck, muscular arms. He had long, thick yellow fingernails, dark wiry hair covering his forearms and sprouting up over the collar of his cloak, meeting a dark beard that was more like fur than hair. His eyes were dangerous, inhuman.

The magic radiating off him was not like a wizard's; at least not any Remus had encountered. Like a full moon, it was searing. The scent, while sickeningly familiar, was not inviting.

Remus had felt at home with the pack; he had felt he belonged. But not with this man. He was the enemy, and always would be.

"Like what you see?" Greyback's smile widened, showing sharp, predatory teeth, long yellow

canines.

Remus stared impassively back, mouth shut.

He realised that Greyback did not like it. Greyback had expected him to speak - to beg, or to rage, or even panic. And Remus knew exactly what to do with bullies who wanted a reaction.

He cocked his head, pulled a nonchalant face and shrugged.

“S’ok, I s’pose. Oi, could I get my clothes back?”

Greyback’s pupils seemed to dilate, or maybe Remus just imagined it. Either way, he recovered quickly, still smiling stiffly.

“Where are my manners? Castor!” He snapped his claw-like fingers.

Castor appeared at Greyback’s side in a moment, straight-backed and wrapped in a fur cloak, carrying a bundle of clothes. Livia was there too, gazing adoringly at her father. The old church they stood in had no ceiling, and in the rosey dawn light Remus could clearly see Castor’s face for the first time. There were three long pink scars down one side; claw marks, pink and soft as burnt skin.

Greyback saw him staring.

“Shame about that,” He said said, reaching out and stroking Castor’s cheek with one filthy fingernail. Castor did not flinch. “Hated to ruin something so pleasant to look at, but he’s learnt his lesson, haven’t you, cub?”

Castor nodded, staring straight ahead like a soldier.

“Good boy.” Greyback stroked his scarred cheek. “Still beautiful though, eh Remus?”

Remus said nothing, and looked away, disgusted.

“And I thought you were a connoisseur of beauty.” Greyback tutted with mock-disappointment. “That’s why I sent you my loveliest children.”

Livia gave a shiver of pleasure at that, tossing her head proudly.

Castor held out Remus’s clothes, and he took them, dressing carefully. He felt in his jeans pocket for his wand, but it wasn’t there.

“Ah,” Greyback growled, “Looking for this?”

He withdrew the long thin stick from his own mud-spattered robes. Remus felt a horrible twist of longing for it. “I’m afraid we don’t allow these foolish human toys.” Greyback smirked. He took Remus’s wand in both hands and snapped it clean it two.

Remus had to struggle not to cry out. That had been *Lyall’s* wand. In fact, it had been the only thing Lyall had ever given Remus that wasn’t completely worthless. He bit the inside of his cheek, hard.

Greyback handed the wand fragments to Livia, who twiddled them gleefully between her fingers like batons. Remus raised his chin, defiantly,

“What do you want from me?”

“I want what I have always wanted, cub,” Greyback stepped closer, so that Remus could smell his sour breath, their noses only inches apart, “I want to take care of you.”

He reached out to place a hand on Remus’s shoulder, and it took every ounce of Remus’s will not to flinch, or duck away. Greyback’s long fingers squeezed him in a fatherly manner - but a bit too close to his throat for comfort.

“I’ve come to join you,” Remus breathed, struggling to hold his nerve.

Greyback tilted back his head and laughed. It was a gruff, wheezing laugh from deep inside his chest.

“That’s what my children tell me. *Remus Lupin has joined us*, they say, *he has cast off the human world...* But I wonder...” He licked his lips, looking Remus up and down lasciviously, “I wonder if Remus Lupin has truly changed his ways...”

“I’m here, aren’t I?” Remus protested, “I’ve spent three moons with--”

“And where were you between the moons?” Greyback challenged. He sniffed the air between them. “You reek of humankind.”

With that, he released Remus’s shoulder, pushing him backwards, hard. Remus hit the stone floor with a thump, and a gasp of surprise and pain as his back jarred. Greyback walked away, his pack dividing to let him through.

“Castor, Livia,” he snarled, “Look after our guest. See if we can’t wring some of that humanity out of him.”

Remus climbed to his feet stiffly, and went to chase after Greyback, but Livia and Gaius blocked him with their bodies. Over their shoulders, he watched Greyback leave the church through an open archway, and disappear into the bright green foliage beyond.

Alone and wandless, Remus backed away from the others warily. He wondered if he could apparate, but he didn’t dare - and after all, surely this was the mission? He had achieved what he’d set out to; he was in Greyback’s pack. Pushing any thought of home or his friends aside, Remus faced his captors. Now was the time to be brave.

Livia approached him first, tossing his splintered wand parts away and grabbing his arms, twisting them hard behind his back. Castor came next, same stoic expression on his face. He was unwinding a length of rope, holding it out.

“Oi!” Remus struggled against Livia, “Piss off, you’re not tying me up!”

“It is not for long, brother,” Livia hissed in his ear. “It is necessary.” Then she *licked* him - she ran her long tongue up from the nape of his neck almost to his hairline. He shuddered in disgust, struggling harder, but she only laughed - she was so strong.

They bound him tightly, then forced him forwards, Castor leading, tugging on the rope around Remus’s arms and body; Livia pushing from behind.

He stumbled awkwardly through the church, still unsteady on his feet, having only just transformed.

He was shoved towards what must once have been the altar. Behind that was an old arched ambulatory, and beneath those shadows a set of steps leading down into a grave-like cellar. They

began to descend, the strong smell of damp earth rising.

“Where are we?” Remus tried asking.

“We are home.” Castor replied, without looking back.

Livia gave him a rough jab in the back, and he didn’t ask any more questions.

They reached the bottom of the stairs, which opened out into a crypt, the vaulted ceiling only just tall enough for Remus to stand straight.

There was not much there. A weird, milky light filled the room but appeared to have no natural source. There were gated chambers either side of the walls, once for tombs, Remus assumed, but now emptied. They had been replaced by blankets, old stained pillows and animal furs.

Remus blinked hard, his eyes adjusting to the light, and before he could get his bearings was thrown forward into one of the cells. Livia growled some incantation and the wrought iron bars slammed closed across it, the heavy black chains coiling tight over the lock.

“Oi!” Remus threw himself wildly against the bars, “What the fuck?!”

“Sit.” Livia barked. Remus’s legs folded beneath him and he was down. She smiled at him. “Rest, brother. Patience.”

“I came here to join you, you can’t treat me like --”

“Do *not* make me silence you.” She hissed.

He shut his mouth - voluntarily. Perhaps it would be better to wait and see, for now. Livia licked her lips. “Try to rest.”

She stalked away. Castor was left behind, staring at Remus, face inscrutable, body still rigid. Remus stared back. His poor face. Had that been because of Remus? Had he been punished for that last time in the Forbidden Forest? His dark eyes bore into Remus for a long time, unflinching, until Remus scowled at him,

“What?!”

“Is Remus Lupin truly here to join the pack? To submit himself to our father?”

“What d’you think?!” Remus jutted out his chin, though he knew he hardly looked dignified, sitting on the filthy floor with his arms bound against his body.

“I think...” Castor inclined his head slightly, as though nobody had ever asked him about his own thoughts before. “...I think that Remus Lupin does not yet know what he will do.”

Remus didn’t have a response for that. Obviously he’d like to think that was not true, that his will was iron, unbreakable. But just now, trapped and unarmed and exhausted, he couldn’t muster up much pride.

Castor didn’t seem to mind. He just nodded very slightly, and then backed away, into the room. “Rest, Remus lupin.” He said, before turning his back.

The crypt was filling up now, the other werewolves were arriving, saturating the room with their scent and their energy. Remus backed into a corner, knees up to his chest, and watched them from the shadows. Their ages only varied slightly - Remus didn’t think any of them were older than

thirty. In various states of undress, he could see that all of them were thin and scarred, and some tattooed. None of them were particularly clean.

Still, as they all settled in, apparently to sleep off the events of the full moon, Remus couldn't help but feel some sense of security and warmth. He was still getting used to being surrounded by his own kind, and the urge to settle down and make himself comfortable as they were all doing was strong. As if their hearts were all beating as one; they were all part of the same body, and now was the time for sleep.

Livia was nowhere to be seen, nor Greyback, and Remus took some comfort from this. The dark chamber grew warm, and as the pack settled in quietly, murmuring and whispering amongst themselves as they bedded down, Remus's eyelids grew heavy and his limbs soft, and eventually the exhaustion caught up with him and he drifted away.

* * *

"Where are you, you filthy little beast?!" Matron's nasal voice screeched as she stalked up and down the echoey hallways, high heels clicking like a predator. "When I get my hands on you I'm going to wallop you into next week!"

Remus curled up even tighter in his hiding place, covering his ears with his hands and squeezing his eyes shut. She'd never find him; he was too good at hiding, and very very small.

He was underneath one of the big boys' beds. He knew he wasn't supposed to be in their dorm, he'd get beaten up if one of them found him; but he knew how to keep quiet. He'd learnt that in the first few days at St Edmund's, and now he'd been there for some time he hardly ever got picked on unless he'd really got in someone's way.

Remus didn't feel very well. He was starting to hurt all over, and his skin was all hot and prickly.

He wanted his mummy, but he didn't know where she was anymore. Maybe she'd gone somewhere with Daddy, and they'd come and get him soon. Maybe they were hunting down the bad man who hurt him.

Remus pinched himself, hard. He didn't want to think about the scary man. He couldn't remember very much of it, except when he was really frightened. Pinching helped, except now the hurting all over was getting even worse. The bones in his legs stung, and he desperately wanted to stretch them out, but then someone might see him.

Finally it was too much, and another wave of pain forced him to uncurl, letting out a cry.

"Owww...."

"Ah ha!"

Oh no. Matron. Suddenly there was a hand around his ankle, and she yanked him hard out from under the bed.

"There you are you little monster! Come with me, you know you've got to go to your room."

*"No..." he moaned, as she hoisted him up and carried him under one arm. Not the room. He **hated** his room; it was so scary. "Let me go!" He beat his fists against her, but she barely reacted, marching down the corridor, down the stairs and towards his cell.*

"Let me go!" He screamed, crying now, snot and tears running down his face, "I want my

mummy! I want my mummy!"

"She's not here." Matron snapped. She opened the door and set him down inside, slamming it shut hard in his face. He heard the bolts go and began to cry harder.

It was so dark.

He was scared of the dark, ever since the bad man, and Mummy always let him have the hallway light on. But Matron wasn't like Mummy; she never did nice things, only horrible things, because he'd been so bad. Was he here because he was bad? Was that why Mummy didn't want him, and Daddy went away?

He sobbed and screamed, but nobody came. It was too scary, and too dark, and it hurt, it hurt it hurt.... A horrible growling filled his head, and suddenly Remus remembered why he didn't feel well, and why he had to be locked in his room.

Remus awoke with a start. His face was wet with tears, and he was sweating all over. It took him long seconds to remember that he was nineteen, not six, and not locked in his cell at St Edmund's.

He hadn't thought about the Home for a long time - and he tried never to re-hash *those* memories. His heart pounded in his ears, adrenaline coursed through him and he struggled to get his emotions back under control.

He was being watched. It was Jeremy - the young man Gaius had been recruiting back in the Manticore's head. He was leaning against the bars, peering at Remus,

"Bad dream?" He asked, his voice rasping, as though he was getting over a bad cold. He was thinner than Remus remembered.

Remus straightened up quickly, reaching up to wipe his face with the back of his sleeves, finding that the ropes had mysteriously vanished. Had someone come in and untied him? Had Livia done it somehow?

The room behind Jeremy was empty, now; it was just the two of them.

"It's ok," Jeremy said, conversationally, "I had bad dreams too, when I first got here. We all do. They tell us it's all of the old stuff coming to the surface; the memories we don't need. Once they're gone, we can start our new lives with the pack."

"Were you all locked up like this?" Remus asked, his throat sore. He was thirsty, but he didn't want to look weak.

"No." Jeremy shrugged. "Just you. They're worried about you. After what you pulled back in the pub. And there are other stories. They talk about you sometimes."

"Who does? Livia? Castor? Greyback?"

Jeremy shrugged again, apathetic.

"Yeah. That lot. They're in charge. Livia's first, because she was turned by Greyback. You get better stuff, if you're a direct descendent."

Remus snorted. He wondered if Jeremy knew that he had been turned by Greyback too, and

whether or not being tied up and thrown in a cell counted as 'better stuff'.

Jeremy began to cough, a deep, chesty crackle, which wracked his body and doubled him over. He pulled his fur cloak tighter around his skinny frame, and Remus finally felt something beyond fear or anger. He felt sympathy.

"Do you all live here, in this place?" He asked, softly, looking around at the dank cellar. "Between the moons?"

Jeremy nodded.

"Better than where I was before." He said. Then, as if bored with the conversation, he simply stepped away. "I'm hungry." he said blandly. "I'll tell someone you're awake. See you."

And Remus was alone again. He climbed to his feet, carefully, checking that nothing was broken or sprained or too sore. No, he actually felt better than he usually did, after a moon - even with Madam Pomfrey's care. If only he wasn't trapped. If only they hadn't destroyed his wand. He reached into his jeans and found that they'd left him with his pocket watch, at least.

Remus held the heavy metal object in his hand, letting it grow warm against his skin. He thought about Sirius - though he knew he ought not to; he didn't know who was listening in on his thoughts, and even if nobody was; Sirius was a weakness.

Was he worried? He must be, Remus told himself. That's what love was, surely.

Had he gone to the castle ruin in Cornwall, where they'd agreed to meet? Had he waited and waited, wondering where Remus was, what had become of him? Perhaps he'd raised the alarm; told the Potters first, then got hold of Moody, or even Dumbledore. Remus didn't think either would be much help. As far as they were concerned, Remus would be in one of three situations:

1. Dead.
2. Completing his mission to infiltrate the werewolves.
3. Turned double agent and *actually* joined the werewolves.

And from Moody's perspective, whichever it was, Remus was best left where he was. He hoped no one had said that to Sirius.

Already feeling his resolve slipping. Remus forced Sirius to the back of his mind. There was nothing he could do but try his hardest to see the mission through, stay alive, and get back to him. That *had* to be his focus.

He paced the cell a few times. It wasn't big; maybe five steps across, three deep. The animal pelts it had been lined with were deer and bear, and something else Remus didn't recognise. Not wolf. Not anything native to Britain. He touched the bars; they felt weirdly warm and seemed to hum against his skin. Magic.

Having a sudden brainwave, Remus stepped back and closed his eyes. He was a bit stiff and still foggy from sleep, but the magic was there, in the room. Leftover from the pack, and from Livia's binding spells. He tried to gather some of it into himself. It was very difficult, without a wand, and with his nerves so shaken.

He pulled and tugged at the atmosphere around him, but it was like trying to smoke an unlit cigarette. Nothing came through, and he just got out of breath. The magic seemed just beyond his grasp.

“Admirable efforts, dearest.”

Remus opened his eyes and jumped, seeing Livia now standing in the middle of the room. She grinned at his discomfort, and gestured to Jeremy, who was coming down the steps behind her, holding a large pewter jug and a plate with some food on it. Bread and meat - it smelled like rabbit, and Remus hoped it was. He began to salivate almost at once.

Livia snapped her fingers, and the jug and plate left Jeremy’s hands and appeared on the floor of Remus’s cell with a *pop*. So, he thought. You could transport things through the bars. That meant he could get out of them, if he tried hard enough.

“Eat up, my darling,” Livia purred. “Father wishes us to be strong.”

“Thank you.” Remus said. He made eye contact with her, and tried to hold it. That had worked with Gaius - and accidentally with Danny. They’d submitted to him, eventually.

Livia returned his stare and smiled, looking very pleased.

“That’s my boy.”

“Where’s Greyback?”

“Show some respect.” Her eyes flashed, and Remus felt a stabbing pain in his skull. He gasped, pressing a flat palm to his forehead, “He is our father.” Livia hissed.

“All right!” He yelped, “Where is our... our father?” It made him sick to say it.

“That is none of your concern.”

“I want to speak to him!”

“In time. Once you have proved yourself.”

“How am I supposed to prove anything locked up in here?!” Remus raged, frustrated. Livia just smiled back at him.

“Remus Lupin will find a way. Goodbye, brother. Do remember to eat something.”

She turned and stalked out, snapping her fingers at Jeremy as she did so. He scurried to follow her back up the stairs, giving one backward glance at Remus as he did, and mouthing, ‘*Sorry*.’

Remus watched their feet disappear as they reached the stop of the stairs, and then heard a loud grinding noise as something heavy closed over the hatch. The strange light that had illuminated the room all this time went out, like a light switch, and Remus was left alone, locked in the dark.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is Diamond Dogs, by David Bowie <3

The War: Submission

Chapter Summary

Warnings: Lots of nasty stuff in here; Remus is imprisoned and alone, he has some very dark/depressive thoughts. Also some negative body image stuff, bullying, abusive relationships, hallucinations, paranoia.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Oh! You silly thing

You've really gone and done it now

Oh! You silly thing

You really gone and done it now

Sunday 25th March 1979

Remus was going mad.

That was the only explanation.

Time passed slowly, each second eeked out over weeks - and then hours whooshed by all at once, like missiles, knocking the breath out of him.

They brought him meals, and that was the only way he could measure out his days. No one spoke to him; perhaps they had been warned not to. Perhaps it was part of his proving himself. They looked, though. They stared.

The pack returned every night to sleep - sometimes Livia, Gaius and Castor were there. Other times not. Never Greyback, though sometimes Remus thought he could smell him - but that might have been the madness. After two days in the dark he didn't trust his senses.

After a week, he trusted nothing.

He was never quite comfortable, always restless and exhausted; pacing until his feet were bruised. He slept little and often; caught between fitful bursts of unconsciousness and insomnia. And he had terrible dreams. Every bad memory squirmed its way up to surface of his mind. Mostly St Edmund's, but also that summer after fifth year, when he'd been at his loneliest, and hated Sirius.

He grew paranoid, convinced that it was the others - they were controlling his mind, somehow; forcing him to see things he didn't want to see; things that weren't there.

Sometimes he dreamed Sirius was dead. Then, when that had wrung all the terror out of him, he dreamed of each of his friends dying, one by one. Their ghosts visited him, weeping or raging.

When he woke up, he never felt like they'd quite gone.

Other times Remus wondered if in fact *he* was dead, and this was some extremely specifically designed hell.

By the end of the first week, he had lost all sense of shame. He wept, he howled, he keened. He laughed maniacally, or else curled up in the corner and whispered to himself. He tried to have conversations in his head, but it didn't work the same way as before. Grant's calming voice transformed into Livia, Sirius into Castor, and Remus was left with no escape at all.

In moments of lucidity, he tried to summon more magic, but it was very hard, and he was so weak.

Sometimes he thought he could do it. One of the others might perform a spell (always wandless; none of them ever did magic the wizard way) to summon something, or illuminate the room - and Remus felt that old stirring of power. But it never lasted long enough.

Finally, Remus's parents appeared to him - in his head, but also in the cell. Hope was crying - she was still sick, even in death, her face gaunt and haggard. She wore a white shroud, and there was earth in her fair hair - even though Remus *knew* she'd been cremated.

Lyall was the worst, though; maybe because Remus had no solid basis for him, beyond a few candid photographs. The Lyall his feverish imagination dreamt up was heartlessly cruel, with a plummy, upper-class accent and cold blue eyes.

"Let that animal destroy my wand, did you?" The spindly ghost whispered in his ear, *"I should have put you out of your misery, all those years ago."*

While the other ghosts shamed him, made him feel small and sorry, Lyall had only ever made Remus angry. He raved like a madman at his father, and flung himself at the walls of his cage.

"Peace, brother." Castor appeared at the bars, after Remus had been doing this for some time. "This is not the way."

"Fuck off!" Remus snarled, holding his head in his hands as he tried to ground himself in reality.

Castor withdrew. Remus continued to suffer. He curled up on the floor and covered his head like a wounded dog. That made him think of Sirius.

Stupid thoughts occurred to him, like - where was Sirius staying? At the Potters'? At their flat? Remus didn't like the idea of Sirius all alone. Was he eating properly? Was he smoking too much? Had he fallen off that stupid bike yet, and broken his neck?!

Was anyone even *looking* for Remus?

He shut his eyes and tried to pretend he was somewhere else. At home in his tiny London flat, reading the paper. Or in his old bed at Hogwarts, with the curtains drawn over.

At night in the crypt, Remus could hear the rest of the pack breathing, snoring, rolling over. Some of them cried, maybe when they thought no one else was awake. Most of the coughed, a result of the damp conditions. After a week, Remus caught the cough too, and felt weaker than ever.

He'd never been *bulky*, exactly - he'd always been decidedly skinny, even after seven years of Hogwarts food. But now Remus barely recognised his own body - the bones in his hips became sharp, his drainpipe jeans slipped down his waist, his ribs stuck up like branches on a winter tree, and his skin grew dry and raw, cracking in places.

This physical weakness only compounded Remus's despair - who did he think he was, joining some stupid rebel army right after school? Had none of the hundreds of books he'd read imbued him with any common sense?!

Of course he couldn't go up against Greyback - the idea was laughable. So laughable, in fact, that Greyback wasn't even going to kill him. Remus was not worth the effort. He was simply going to waste away to nothing in this cell, and nobody would ever know.

"You are not trying." Castor said, returning to view him.

Maybe it had only been a few hours since the first time he'd tried to get through to Remus. Maybe it had been days.

It must have been daytime, because no one else was in the crypt.

"Let me out!" Remus babbled, clutching at the bars of his cage. "Please!"

"Let yourself out." Castor returned, coldly.

"I don't have my wand!"

Castor tutted at him. He held out his empty palm, and a blood red flame appeared in it. It lent a soft, alluring glow to Castor's features, blurring the jagged edges of his scar and making him beautiful again.

"We do not need wands, Remus, we do not borrow magic like common humans."

"I don't have enough." Remus groaned, slumping back.

"Idiot." Castor said, closing his hand over the flame, burning it into a fist. "You are brimming with it. You are still thinking like a human. Why do you think he put you here?"

"To watch me die."

"Idiot." Castor repeated, shaking his head disdainfully.

"*Why*, then?!" Remus growled.

Castor glanced around covertly to confirm that they were alone. He came closer. His scent was stronger as he positioned himself right up against the cell bars, and Remus felt an involuntary pull of attraction towards him. Castor lowered his voice,

"You are being tested, you fool. You are only the fourth child of Greyback to return to him - do you know what position that gives you?! What kind of power?! You've seen Livia and Gaius, you know what you are capable of."

"But why--"

"You attacked Gaius. Last summer. Greyback is worried about you now - he won't say it, but he is. No one challenges those two, *no one*."

"I didn't mean to challenge anyone, he attacked me first, and I--"

"You acted like a wolf." Castor said, triumphantly, his soft lips curling at the corners, "And that is what you must do now."

“Why are you telling me this?” Remus eyed him suspiciously. Because it made a weird kind of sense, now, as if Castor had shaken him awake.

“Because you are no good to me in this cage.” Castor said, dark eyes burning with intensity. “A year ago Remus Lupin spoke to me of change. Of a better life. I have not forgotten.”

“I seem to remember you laughing in my face.” Remus returned, bitterly, ““The pack is everything’, wasn’t that what you said?”

“The pack *is* everything.” Castor said, fiercely. “That has not changed. Other things have. You are not without allies, here.”

“If you want my help so badly, then *you* get me out.” Remus said.

Castor raised an eyebrow, giving Remus a long hard appraising look.

“It will be better for you if you do it yourself. The others *must* see you succeed.”

Remus was about to ask another question, when the atmosphere changed - Livia was coming. Castor backed away quickly, and said nothing more. Remus watched him from a distance, his mind finally beginning to work.

* * *

He needed magic. He needed power, and he needed a good strong emotion to get it all going. Luckily, Remus had always had strong emotions in abundance. That, and patience.

Buoyed by Castor’s intriguing proposition, Remus found it much easier to concentrate, and to stay calm. Now that he knew he was not entirely alone, the ghostly apparitions became easier to ignore.

And he started to notice things. Like how the other werewolves were not as homogeneous as they first seemed. They were all fairly young - clearly Greyback had a preferred type; not one of them seemed older than twenty-five. They were all thin and scarred.

But the more Remus watched them, the more he saw their differences. Friendships and alliances; grudges and feuds, likes and dislikes.

When he paid very close attention, Remus could even tell how long each of them had been werewolves - it was clear from the hierarchy. The younger set fell in two camps; fanatics who worshipped Livia and Gaius, and those who were less sure, less comfortable with this weird subterranean lifestyle. They tended to side with Castor; sleeping on one side of the crypt, talking amongst themselves.

Gaius in particular seemed troubled by this group. He stalked the crypt floor every evening, demanding quiet, ordering them to lie further apart. Remus knew from their first meeting in the Manticore’s Head that Gaius had a short fuse, and as soon as Remus latched onto this idea, he knew he had to come up with a way to exploit it.

Help eventually came from an unexpected quarter. Jeremy, one of the very youngest members of the pack, and so far the only one who’d spoken to Remus other than Castor and Livia, got bored easily. He had a mischievous side which reminded Remus of James and Sirius - he often cracked jokes to make the others laugh, and was one of the more vocal complainers when it came to living conditions.

Gaius disliked him immensely, of course, and never missed an opportunity to put him back in his

place.

One evening, as everyone was settling down to sleep, Jeremy was struck by a particularly violent coughing fit. In Remus's opinion, he was definitely hamming it up, it went on a lot longer than was probably necessary.

"Control yourself, brother." Gaius hissed, on his feet at once, crossing the crypt to stand over Jeremy, teeth bared.

"Sor- ry ," Jeremy spluttered, scowling sarcastically, "I can't help it, it's the damp!"

"Your brothers and sisters seem to manage well enough." Gaius returned, bored.

Jeremy snorted. Gaius raised a hand, as if about to cast a spell.

"Perhaps you need to be reminded how to behave."

Jeremy licked his lips, nervously, and fell quiet. Castor, who had been sitting nearby, stood up. He placed a hand on Gaius's shoulder,

"I will speak to him, brother. Do not concern yourself."

"Our father demands obedience." Gaius hissed. Castor's eyes flashed,

"I am well aware of our father's demands."

Gaius clearly wanted to retort, but seeing the fire in Castor's expression thought better of it and withdrew, skulking away, snapping angrily at three young women huddled together who had been watching the whole thing.

Castor crouched and whispered to Jeremy,

"Do not provoke him."

"He's a prick! He's not Greyback, he can't order us about!"

"Do *not* provoke him." Castor repeated, a note of warning in his voice. It was not heeded.

"I was coughing! I couldn't help it! Not as if I was whistling a jaunty tune!"

Giggling from the women nearby.

"Peace." Castor said.

Everyone seemed to settle down after that; order and quiet were restored. Remus sat leaning against the back wall of his cell, arms hugging his knees. In one hand he clutched his pocket watch, which had grown hot and slippery from being held all the time.

Suddenly, there was a long, low whistle. Remus's eyes snapped open, his stomach turning over.
That maniac .

The girls near Jeremy were giggling again as he began to whistle a little tune - Remus thought it sounded like 'Mary had a Little Lamb', but he wasn't good with nursery rhymes.

It only lasted a few bars - Gaius was on him in seconds, snarling, hands around Jeremy's throat. The young man's body went stiff as a board, and Remus could instantly smell the charcoal black

magic Gaius was using to subdue him.

It was like a faint tingling sensation; all of the hairs on his arm stood up. Remus closed his eyes and inhaled, drinking in the magical energy as though he had been thirsting for it. The deliciousness was heightened by Gaius's terrible rage; by his flaming desire to hurt.

That was it. That was *it* ! Remus was giddy with excitement as the pieces clicked into place.

"Brother," Livia's voice now. She slinked across the floor towards Gaius, languid as a cat. "Leave the pup. He is restless and spirited, that is all."

Gaius released Jeremy, who collapsed back, coughing harder than before now. Remus could smell the salt from his tears. Castor knelt beside the young man, a kind hand on his shoulder.

Remus began to think quickly. He was rubbish at whistling - he could wolf whistle (and did Sirius *love* the irony of that), but he couldn't carry a tune. What else would be annoying? He needed Gaius's attention - he needed his *rage* .

He cleared his sore throat.

" *Still dunno what I was waiting for...* " Remus tried, his voice a bit croaky and reedy from lack of use.

There was a flutter of movement, a sense of ears pricking up, as if they were waiting to see what he was up to. It was badly out of tune, too, but it was the only song he could remember all the words to.

Remus swallowed, and raised his voice louder, standing up and approaching the bars,

" *And my time was running wild, a million dead end streets, and...* " A bit more movement now, a few of the younger ones were sitting up, peering over at him, " *Every time I thought I'd got it made, it seemed the taste was not so sweet...* "

A few sniggers. Someone whispered, "He's finally lost it."

" *So I turned myself to face me...* " Remus shut his eyes and bellowed, rolling his forehead against the cold bars, " *Though I'd never caught a glimpse, of how the others must see the faker--* "

"Silence!" Gaius's sharp voice rang out.

" *I'm much too fast to take that test...* "

"SILENCE!"

Remus tipped his head back and took a deep breath,

"*CH CH CHANGES! TURN AND FACE THE STRANGE CH CH CHA-ANGES!*"

"Remus Lupin!" Gaius was up, striding towards him, one hand raised. "Stop this AT ONCE!"

" *DON'T WANNA BE A RICHER MAN...* " Remus continued, feeling Gaius's fierce magical energy filling the space between them, like a tidal wave of hot air rushing over him, drenching him. He squeezed his pocket watch tighter, and drew the magic out of that, too, sucking it into his bones, his very marrow.

Remus opened his eyes, and the bars of his cell vanished like smoke. Grinning, he stepped

forward, crossing the threshold into the crypt. He was free.

“*Time may change me...*” he half-sang, half laughed at Gaius, who stood before him, gobsmacked,

“Get back! Livia! Castor! Help me--”

“Shut up, Gaius.” Remus raised his hand, barely thinking about it, just letting the magic do the work. Gaius was silenced. His mouth opened and closed a few times, eyes wide with terror. Remus felt a surge of pleasure at this. *Yes! Fear me*. “Good boy,” he smirked. “Now, in you pop...”

He stood aside and pushed Gaius forcefully into the cell, before snapping his fingers so that the bars reappeared at once. Gaius found his voice and roared, furious,

“Let me out!”

Remus laughed. He was about to turn, to address the rest of the pack - they were all murmuring now, various degrees of nervousness and excitement. He felt a hand on his shoulder. Livia appeared on his left, Castor to his right. They were both smiling, pride gleaming in their eyes.

“My brother,” Livia whispered, “At last! Father will be so proud.”

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Silly Thing' by The Sex Pistols.

The song Remus sings to piss off Gaius is 'Changes' by David Bowie.

The War: Foot Soldiers

Chapter Summary

References to sex, violence and animal death in this chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I count the corpses on my left,

I find I'm not so tidy.

So I'd better get away, better make it today

I've cut twenty-three down since friday.

But I can't control it.

My face is drawn, my instinct still emotes it.

The hot swell of power in Remus's body did not dissipate as quickly as it had before - perhaps simply because it was always there - only now he knew how to tune into it. Or maybe it was a defence mechanism, because instinct told him what was coming next.

Everyone in the crypt could feel it. A few of them stood up anxiously. Livia closed her eyes and sighed with pleasure.

The heavy, swift footsteps echoed through from the church above. Adrenaline flooded Remus's body as the concrete slab covering the entrance of the crypt was pushed aside.

Greyback descended. He looked different from before. He was not on the defensive now. He was smiling, his posture and scent welcoming. Amiable.

Remus's heart skipped a beat.

Greyback smiled, his eyes dark and secretive as the forest.

"Remus Lupin," he said. "I think it's time for a chat."

Remus nodded, awestruck.

Greyback nodded too, still smiling, then turned and began to climb the stairs again. Remus followed without even glancing back. Finally, finally, this was his chance. To do what, he didn't know yet. All Remus knew in that moment was that his father had come for him, and he was elated.

The air grew fresher and cleaner as they surfaced in the ruined church, and Remus breathed in deeply, closing his eyes. It was close to evening; cool and quiet. Under the dimly lit clouds the

forest around them was transforming from day to night, the nocturnal creatures yawning and stretching and creeping out of their holes and tunnels.

Greyback led Remus up the aisle of the church, through to the arched exit, and they walked - not very far - through the slender beech saplings, past sturdy English oaks, down a narrow hidden pathway which led to a kind of cave at the base of a hill. A den.

Without looking back, Greyback entered, stooping only slightly at the entrance before straightening up as the mouth of the den opened up wider and higher than Remus could have anticipated from the outside. He followed, because there was nothing else to do.

Inside it smelled like home. Earth and forest and meat and wolf.

Though there was no natural light source, as soon as Greyback entered a series of torches along the walls of the den lit themselves, creating a cosy, welcoming space. There was even a fire with a pewter cauldron hung over it brimming with something that smelled thick and savoury. A wooden table beside the fireplace was laden with food of all kinds – freshly killed and skinned game, bowls of nuts and berries, mushrooms, nettles and bread.

The sides of the cave had been carved out into shelves and hollows full of books and scrolls. There were a few wooden stools scattered about, and Greyback gestured that Remus be seated.

Remus sat, staring about. Further back, hidden in shadows, he could smell a bed - or at least the place Greyback slept.

More distracting, though, was the smell of the stew. Remus had taken most of his meals cold over the past week and a half in the dark. The delicious smell of a hot meal threatened to overwhelm him.

He watched his captor take a porcelain bowl from a shelf and ladle a small portion of stew from the cauldron, then pick up a spoon and carry it over to him. Greyback handed him the bowl and Remus took it, still unable to take his eyes off Greyback.

His shape filled the entryway, hard, muscular and unmoving. His coarse dark hair was pulled back in a knot and his yellow eyes bore down on Remus, both curious and challenging at the same time.

Despite his larger than life demeanour, there was also a quietness about him that Remus had only seen in wild animals. A still silence which promised something more sinister, like a spring-loaded trap.

Greyback took a seat opposite Remus, hands on his knees, and nodded at the bowl of stew warming Remus's hands.

"Eat." He said.

Without hesitation - Remus did not yet know if he was following orders because he had to, or because he wanted to - he scooped up some stew and put the spoon in his mouth. He could have cried. It was the most delicious thing he had ever tasted, hot and full of flavour – some kind of dark meat and rich onion. He chewed, as instructed, before swallowing hard.

Greyback licked his sharp pointed teeth, "Good cub."

Remus ignored him, and continued to eat, suddenly starving hungry. A poem he had once read popped into his head, like a warning:

*Though the goblins cuffed and caught her,
Coaxed and fought her,
Bullied and besought her,
Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,
Kicked and knocked her,
Mauled and mocked her,
Lizzie uttered not a word;
Would not open lip from lip
Lest they should cram a mouthful in.*

Of course, that was goblins. You mustn't eat food given to you by fairies, or goblins - there was nothing he'd read about werewolves. But then, what had he ever managed to learn about werewolves?

Greyback watched him a while longer, as though they were sitting down to supper together; old friends. He waited until Remus had almost finished eating to speak.

"Picked on Gaius in the end, eh? Interesting, that. I thought perhaps Castor."

"He was being cruel." Remus answered.

"He's a good cub. Beautiful wolf; powerful. But he has a few things to learn about leadership, that I'll grant you. What do you think of my other children, eh?"

Remus finished eating. He swallowed, and sucked on the spoon thoughtfully, before setting it back in the empty bowl. He looked Greyback in the eye.

"I feel sorry for them."

"Sorry?"

"For the way they live. There's no dignity in it."

Greyback's eyes gleamed.

"Dignity. What a delightful creature you are, Remus Lupin. Yes, dignity. That's exactly the word. Exactly." Greyback was stroking his beard, thoughtfully. "It is a temporary situation, of course. When this war is won--"

"When this war is won," Remus said, steadily, "Werewolves will be more hated and feared than ever before. Because of what you have done. Because of your crimes."

Greyback tossed back his head and laughed, showing long yellow teeth,

"*Truly* delightful, cub. I worried that so long in that cell might have softened you, but..."

Greyback raised a bushy eyebrow, and Remus felt an unpleasant wriggling inside his brain, as

though someone was swirling their fingers through his thoughts. He screwed up his face, and Greyback gave a low chuckle deep in his throat, “No. Still unbroken. My good, strong cub.”

Remus stared at him. The wriggling sensation stopped.

“You mean,” he breathed, “You didn’t want to break me?”

“Of course not.” Greyback spat, scornfully, “Is that what you think? Are these the vile lies spread about me? Why would a father wish harm upon his children?”

Remus cocked his head,

“You tell me. Why would you attack a five year old? Why have me locked up?”

“Trivia,” Greyback waved a long-nailed hand dismissively, “These are not the questions you want answers to, do not pretend.”

“How do you know what I want?!” Remus felt his temper rising, and struggled to keep it under control. He tried to hang on to the feeling of power he’d taken from Gaius, to soak up the magic he could feel in the earthen walls of the den.

“I know everything about you, Remus Lupin.” He looked at him with razor sharp eyes once more, and Remus felt that unpleasant shuffling through his thoughts.

“No, that’s not fair.” Remus shook his head, trying to build a wall up against Greyback. “You’re using legilimency!”

“Pah. A wizard trick. Wolves do not read minds. Wolves see souls.”

It sounded like the same thing to Remus. Greyback’s lips curled into a wicked smile once more,

“No, Remus Lupin. It isn’t the same. One can change one’s mind, after all. Remus Lupin might sympathise with his packmates one day, and revile them the next. That is the mind. But Remus Lupin’s *soul*...”

Greyback closed his eyes and inhaled, as if Remus smelled particularly delicious.

“Stop it!”

“Make me.”

Remus tried. He tried very, very hard, forcing the magic within him back out, through his eyes, through his thoughts. It seemed to work. His mind calmed, and Greyback leaned back, looking pleased. Remus was so confused now - he didn’t *want* to please Greyback, not ever.

“It’s perfectly all right to hate me, you know.” Greyback said, stretching his arms out, rolling his shoulders as though he was preparing for bed - or for a fight, “It is natural to resent one’s father.”

You’re not my father. Remus thought, in the part of his brain where he still felt like himself, *I’ve never had a father, and I’ve never needed one.*

“Answer my questions.” Remus said, as forcefully as he could manage, “If you care about me so much... like a... like a father, then why turn me?! Why hunt me down for years, then stick me in a cage the second I show up?!”

Greyback was laughing at him again, rows and rows of teeth, long red tongue.

"You can thank Lyall Lupin for your transformation."

"Right." Remus pulled a face, "Awfully human, isn't it?! Revenge?"

"Self-preservation." Greyback countered, scratching behind his ear amusedly. "Lyall had ideas about how my family should be treated. Uneducated ideas. He needed to learn."

"Then why not attack *him* --"

"Because he was *weak* ." Greyback hissed, "I could smell it on him. No backbone at all, a hypocrite. And I was proved right. A better man would not have abandoned his pup and his bitch. Though perhaps I ought to thank him. He destroyed himself before any of that weakness could creep into you." He licked his lips, "It's become my motto. Get 'em young, grow 'em strong."

Remus felt like throwing up. He hated Greyback so fiercely it was as if his insides had turned to bile.

"If you believe that," he carried on, stoically, mouth full of saliva making his words thick and sloppy, "Then why wait so long to find me? You could have snatched me out of the Home any time."

"I considered it," Greyback nodded, tilting his head thoughtfully, "I took Livia when she was barely speaking. Castor and Gaius when they were tots. But you were a different case. Dumbledore had his paws all over you before Lyall was even in the ground. I knew what the old codger was thinking - his own pet werewolf; his own tamed beast, all trained up and given a head full of wizard tricks and wizard lies. An educated monster." He licked his lips lasciviously, "I knew all of this, and I thought... why not? Let the cub come to me when the time was right, let him learn all he can learn of the wizarding world, and we shall see, then, which side wins out."

"Side? You mean... you or Dumbledore?"

"Nature or nurture." Greyback sniggered. Remus recoiled, disgusted,

"So I'm an experiment?!"

"In a manner of speaking."

Remus finally tore his eyes away, unable to stare into Greyback's laser beam gaze any longer. His eyes caught on the bookcase to his right. They were all classics. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

"And the cage?" He asked, shakily, staring at the gold lettering on each leatherbound book. "Was that part of the experiment?"

"It was clear that you had grown too reliant on the tricks Dumbledore taught you." Greyback said, as if it was all perfectly reasonable, "You were confined only as long as was necessary, to ensure that your true gifts were strong enough to shine through. And they were, cub. Look at you now; just *blistering* with power."

Remus looked up at him, finally, meeting those wolfish yellow eyes once more. Fine, then. If he was so powerful, he could use it. Burning with bitter, acid hatred, Remus pushed out once more, focussing as sharply as he could on Greyback's body.

Make him weak, make him hurt.

Greyback straightened his back in his stool, and closed his eyes, grinning as though Remus was caressing him, not firing every foul thing he could. Then the werewolf raised a hand - and Remus saw that it was trembling, very slightly. Still, Greyback was incredibly powerful, and Remus could feel his own magic countered and blocked. Worth a try.

“Very good, Remus Lupin,” Greyback said, after a long time, his voice a little more hoarse than it had been. “Very good, cub...” He sighed. “Enough, for tonight, perhaps. We’ll speak again.”

Remus stood quickly, feeling as if all this time he had been weighted down to the stool; and now the weight was gone.

“One moment...” Greyback rose as well, and pushed past Remus into the shadowy sleeping chamber behind. He returned seconds later with a large grey fur, and handed it to Remus. “A gift, cub. Welcome to the pack.”

Remus took it, and held it over one arm, cautiously. It was beautiful; the soft fur silver and black under his fingers.

“I can go?” He asked, glancing at the den mouth, now unguarded and open. He was suddenly nervous.

“Of course. You know the way back. You are not in the wizard world now; you are free. Go where you please. Return to the pack. Or else... if you prefer to sleep here?” His face turned hungry again, his smile mocking, as he stepped aside and gestured towards his own bed.

Remus’s stomach turned again, and he backed out of the den as quickly as he could.

He stood outside by himself for a long time. The thought of apparating - of getting out of there as fast as he possibly could; going home to Sirius and London and his friends - occurred only fleetingly.

Night had fallen in the forest. Remus breathed in the lovely air, and looked up at the fine lights in the sky. Owls swooped overhead, on the hunt for prey. Foxes crept through the underbrush, moles ploughed through the soil below his feet. He felt as much a part of this place as they were. A natural creature, coming to life.

A cool breeze rustled the leaves above him, and he shivered. Without thinking, Remus pulled the fur cloak over his shoulders, wrapping it tight around himself. It felt good, like a second skin. He breathed and exhaled once more, to savour the peace and quiet of being alone. Then he turned away from the den, and returned to his pack.

* * *

Things changed, after that, of course. By the time Remus returned to the pack that evening he already had a new place in the hierarchy. Gaius had been freed from his prison, and he did not meet Remus’s eyes; did not challenge him, just slunk away to his corner. Livia made it clear that Remus now outranked Gaius, by approaching first and stroking his new furs, purring with joy,

“Beautiful,” she said, “beautiful.”

And when it came time to settle in and sleep, Remus had his pick of anywhere he liked on the crypt floor. This had to be a carefully thought through decision; sleep beside Livia, the alpha bitch, and what was that saying? It would certainly tell Gaius exactly where he stood. It’s what Moody would suggest, if Moody had half a clue how to conduct himself in such a situation.

He had reservations about Castor too. For one thing, instinct told him to side with the handsome young man - and he knew that it wasn't entirely to do with the fact that Castor had helped him. Remus was used to the scent now, but that didn't make him any less attracted. For another thing, Castor was clearly a dissenter. Siding with him might give rise to suspicion from other members of the pack.

But he was tired and sleepy, and he had made so many life altering decisions already. So he chose Castor, who felt safe at least. Remus would have to beg forgiveness later.

In the days that followed, Remus got to know the pack not only by scent and as fellow outcasts - but as individual people. Plenty of them, like Jeremy, were recent converts. Teenage runaways, disowned children of shamed wizarding families. All of them had difficult stories of hunger and suffering and terrible abuse.

For the first time in his life, Remus felt he had had a privileged childhood. So what if Matron was a stone-hearted old cow who hated children. He'd had a roof over his head.

Some of them were kind and funny, some of them were silly and immature. Some of them were sad and shy. Every day Remus grew more desperate to help them; to find a better place and a better life for each and every one.

But of course they didn't all have the same story. Some of them were not with Greyback for protection or shelter - some of them really *were* there for revenge. They believed in their father's philosophy wholeheartedly; murder for them was not a crime, only the nature of a predator. The world owed them blood, and they were going to take it.

"I believed it too." Castor said, the next morning. He had offered to show Remus their hunting trails in the forest. They caught rabbits and other game using instinct and magic. "I believed everything he said, for a long time. He's the only teacher I ever had."

"But you changed your mind?" Remus asked, half hoping, because he still wasn't quite sure about Castor's motivations.

"Yes." Castor replied, not noticing Remus's trepidation. "It was a slow process."

"What triggered it?" Remus was puffing a bit to keep up with Castor, who was lithe and muscular, the epitome of good health, despite his scars.

"No one thing in particular," Castor said, stopping still and looking around, as though he'd caught a scent. He seemed to think better of it, and carried on walking, head held high, eyes sharp. He was so natural and relaxed in himself. Remus didn't think *he* could ever be like that. It vaguely made him think of Sirius - except of course Castor talked a lot less. You had to really drag answers out of him.

"Nothing in particular?" Remus panted, "Something must have--"

"Books." Castor said, striding ahead, on the trail of something.

"Books?!"

"Father encourages us to educate ourselves. To develop independent thoughts. And I did. It is the way of nature, to rebel against one's father."

That sounded eerily like Greyback. Castor often did that - they all did. They spoke with one voice, and it was always his.

“But if he encourages that, then why haven’t more of the others--”

“I said that we are encouraged, not forced.” Castor said, a small ironic smile playing on his lips.

“Oh.” Remus said. He remembered Livia quoting Plato to him. Being educated didn’t mean you all came to the same conclusions.

“I listened to what you said, too.” Castor said, finally. “When I was trapped by the dryad, in Scotland. I knew you were my enemy, but I did not want to harm you. And then I realised I did not want to harm anybody. I think we can live in peace, away from mankind, as other creatures have learnt to.”

“Is that really what you want--?”

Castor put a hand out quickly, and crouched low. There was a rabbit not five feet away. Remus held his breath and watched as Castor crept forward slowly, whispering a calming incantation. When he reached the creature, it hopped dozily into his lap. He stroked it softly for a moment, still whispering. Then he broke its neck.

Remus wanted to be disgusted, to feel sorry for the rabbit. But he could already smell the blood and his stomach growled. Castor smiled at him, greyish eyes lighting up. He held out the rabbit, blood sliding down his wrist,

“For you, Remus Lupin.”

Remus was flattered.

Jeremy showed Remus some of the pack’s ‘gathering’ techniques, which basically amounted to theft. There were towns around the outskirts of the forest, and all they needed to do was apparate there and find an empty house, which could be done by scent.

They were standing in the bedroom of one such house when Jeremy spilled the whole truth about the pack’s part in the war.

If Remus hadn’t been bothered by a rabbit being unceremoniously slaughtered in front of him, then burgling a house wasn’t going to curl his hair. In fact, it brought back a few fond memories of his criminal youth. Still, he didn’t really participate. Just nosed through the clothes in the wardrobe while Jeremy searched for jewellery in the dresser.

“The way I see it,” Jeremy said cheerfully, “Greyback might be a bit full of himself, bit high and mighty. But he’s done a lot for me, and plenty others. He cares more than anyone else has since I got this bloody bite.”

“Have you done any of this self-educating stuff?” Remus asked, casually.

“Not for me.” Jeremy said, “Never much into reading. Preferred quidditch.”

“Hm.”

“Ugh, pearls.” Jeremy tutted, lifting a knot of them out of a green velvet box. “Hate the way they feel in your hands. My mother always wore them - pureblood heirloom.”

“You’re a pureblood?” Remus turned around, mildly surprised.

“Nah, mother is. Dad’s a mix. Doesn’t mean much anymore. I’m worse to them than a mudblood,

now. Bastards.” He slammed the drawer shut angrily. “That's one of the things Greyback’s right about. They deserve what they’re getting.”

“Who does?”

“The purebloods.”

“What do you mean?” Remus knew he sounded stupid, but he was genuinely confused. He had always been told that some of Voldemort’s greatest allies were the pureblood houses - that it was the half-bloods and the muggleborns who he targeted.

He said as much to Jeremy.

“Oh, yeah,” Jeremy nodded blithely, “We’ve done one or two of those. But most of the time we’re really a scare tactic to keep the old families in line.”

Remus pressed for more information and Jeremy - who had been eager to do anything he could for Remus ever since the Gaius incident - was all too happy to elaborate. Voldemort was using the werewolves as little more than hired muscle. If any of his influential wealthy supporters started questioning him a little bit too much, started having doubts, then all it took was a visit from Fenrir Greyback and a few of his mad, feral acolytes to get everyone back on the same page.

“Seen loads of mansions lately,” Jeremy cackled with laughter. He caught the look Remus was giving him. “Oh, what?! I told you, they *deserve* it. They shouldn’t have gone over to his side in the first place.”

“Wait, so you don’t even support Voldemort?!” Remus gaped at him.

“Course not, he’s a right weirdo. Scares the shit out of me, to be honest. But, y’know. I didn’t choose this side, it’s just the hand I got dealt.”

“But if you did have a choice, if you--”

“There is no choice, Remus Lupin!” Jeremy said fiercely, that voice coming out of his mouth which wasn’t his own. “There is the pack. We can trust no one else. You must get used to it, if you want to be one of us.”

And that was as far as he could get with any of them. After a certain point, they all reverted back to the same old script. Greyback was their leader, and even if they did not agree with him in everything, most if they felt indebted to him, and trusted him before anything else.

By daylight, Remus was never sure if he could really trust Castor or Jeremy - or any of the others. Even Castor, who was interested in hearing what Remus had to say, and who was determined to convince the others to withdraw from the war.

“It is not an easy thing.” Castor tried to explain, “To realise that our father is wrong, that we must have no part in any wizard affairs, least of all war. It would mean splitting the pack.”

“Can you do that?” Remus asked, impressed. Castor gave a small shrug of his shoulders.

“Perhaps.”

Helpful.

Remus expected to see Greyback again, now he had been fully initiated, but the pack father stayed

strangely remote. He occasionally summoned Livia, who Remus learnt had been with him the longest - almost all of her thirty years. (Remus was shocked to learn her age - she seemed at once too young and too old.) Otherwise, Remus was left to his own devices.

He could have left whenever he liked, that had been made clear to him. But he'd told the others in the pack that he had nowhere else to go, like them. He needed their trust, and for that they needed to be able to relate to him. So he never tried to sneak away and send a message to the Order - he wasn't even sure if that was possible, but he didn't try. He knew he might never have this chance again - and after all, it was what Dumbledore had bred him for.

As far as Dumbledore and Moody and Ferox and every other adult who liked pushing Remus around their chess board was concerned, he was exactly where he was supposed to be. And he wasn't miserable. He was lonely, of course; he longed for Sirius like a missing limb, and he'd have done anything for a shower, a cigarette and a bar of chocolate. But the forest had begun to feel like a place he belonged - the other wolves felt like family. His mission grew clearer with every day, and he knew he couldn't leave. So he stayed in plain sight at all times, and didn't speak a word about his friendships and connections back home.

Friendship was different among the werewolves. Pack solidarity was everything, and Remus felt it too - sometimes he thought he would die to protect them, even Gaius. The only feeling that had ever come close to it was when the marauders were in their animagus forms back at Hogwarts - and Remus supposed that made some sense.

Sex was different with them, too. Midway through the month, Remus noticed a few pack members pairing off, vanishing into the woods for an hour or so at a time, returning with that all too familiar scent. It was obvious what they were all doing, but no one seemed to mind, or take much notice. It was just another instinct they all accepted and followed without question.

"The desire grows stronger as the moon approaches," Castor explained, as they lay in the crypt one night trying to ignore the quiet gasping and fumbling around them.

"I'd never noticed before." Remus lied, staring up at the ceiling.

"If you choose to mate," Castor whispered, "Choose wisely. They look up to you, they will notice favoritism."

"No." Remus said. "I'm not... I have someone already."

"A human?"

"Yes."

"Then you plan to return." Castor finished. He sounded so sad about it. Remus wanted to turn and apologise, comfort him somehow, but that was dangerous territory and he knew it. The air was already thick with lust, and he didn't know what he'd do.

"I have to, eventually." Remus said. "But I want to make sure you're all safe, first."

"We will survive without you, Remus Lupin." Castor returned, his voice no longer its usual calm steady timbre. "You are not our leader yet."

The song at the beginning is 'Running Gun Blues' by David Bowie.

The poem Remus remembers is from 'Goblin Market' by Christina Rossetti.

The War: Blood Moon

Chapter Summary

CW for wolfy gore

Remus had almost spent a full month in Greyback's pack before he was truly given a reason to leave. He woke late one morning to find himself almost alone. Confused, he sat up, staring around - he'd grown used to having Castor and Jeremy nearby, he felt horribly exposed without their body heat.

"Father summoned them." A voice came out of the gloom.

Remus raised his palm to create a heat-free flame for light, as Castor had taught him. It was easier than *lumos*, though not as bright. Gaius stepped out from the shadows of one of the chambers. He stared down at Remus. "Father came this morning. Summoned Castor and Livia. Only them. I suppose Castor is forgiven, now."

"Will they be back soon?" Remus asked warily, drawing his cloak around his shoulders protectively.

"I don't expect so." Gaius mused. He was fiddling with something shiny, kept glancing down at it, "They've gone to meet the Dark Lord."

"What?!"

"It's almost the moon. He'll have plans for the pack."

"...plans?" Reality came clanging down on Remus's head, like glass shattering; like a car crash.

"You know," Gaius said, apparently uninterested in Remus's crisis of conscience, "I always wondered why father turned three males. I thought perhaps he wished us to learn to lead together; to share the burden of responsibility. But now I realise. He means us to compete."

"What do you want, Gaius?" Remus stood up, squaring his shoulders to remind Gaius that he was bigger, and stronger, when he wanted to be. "Want me to sing you another song?"

Gaius sneered at him, cheeks red. He backed away.

"You will not triumph." He said. He threw the shiny object down at Remus's feet before turning to leave, and it made a hard, metal sound. It was Remus's pocket watch.

"Oi!" Remus yelled, stooping to grab it up. But Gaius was gone.

Remus slumped against the wall, running his fingers through his grimy hair. His heart raced, his breathing quickened, and he began to panic. *Shit . Shit shit shit* .

Of *course* they were still working with Voldemort - the war hadn't stopped simply because Remus was there. He felt stupid and naïve - and worst of all, he felt guilty. He was supposed to be on a bloody mission! But he hadn't been thinking of the Order, not really - he'd been more concerned

about protecting the pack than getting back to his friends; his true family. All this time, Remus had thought of himself as a victim - when really he was the worst kind of traitor.

He shrugged off his fur cloak. He didn't want to look like them.

He badly wanted to see Sirius - after weeks of suppressing it, his longing burst up like a geyser, so that he couldn't get a grip on it and squash it back down again. Sirius would know what to do - or he'd at least make Remus feel better about everything.

Remus looked down at his watch, the only connection he still has to his friends. The gold had lost its lustre, and he rubbed it on his filthy trouser leg to see if that helped. Then he opened and closed it a few times, running the pads of his thumbs along the smooth vine leaf engraving. It had stopped working the day he used it to escape his cell; he'd squeezed all the magic out of it like a sponge. Another betrayal.

Once he had at least calmed his breathing down (*jesus christ what I wouldn't do for a fag*), Remus tried to think rationally. His first instinct was to get out immediately; just walk into the woods and disappear.

But then what? Explain to Moody and Ferox that while he'd had a lovely few weeks away, things had got a bit too scary so he'd turned tailed at the first opportunity? No. If Greyback was meeting with Voldemort then that had to mean an attack was coming. Remus couldn't let that happen.

He would wait, at least to find out if Castor would tell him anything. In the meantime, Remus did his very best to conjure up a happy memory. He would need to send a patronus as soon as possible.

* * *

Brothers! Sisters! Gather near.

Livia's voice inside his head had to be one of the least pleasant experiences Remus had had since joining the pack. It worked, though, he scrambled up the stairs of the crypt into the ruined church, where the others were congregating. Greyback stood by the pulpit, Castor and Livia either side of him, backs straight and heads high.

"My children," Greyback addressed them all, raising his arms like an evangelist preacher, "The moon approaches, our time is near."

There was a murmur of excitement at this. For many, the full moons represented a chance to be free; to be one's true self.

Greyback raised a finger to silence them. He smiled paternally, "I have spoken with our benefactor. This moon, we shall feast on our enemies. We have been given the gift of prey."

Some of the pack members cheered and whooped, chattering with even more excitement.

Oh no, Remus's stomach lurched, *oh no, oh no...*

"Livia and Castor will lead you." Greyback said, "You will bring the girl-child to me - the parents you may keep for yourselves."

More cheering. Not everyone - Remus saw a few of the younger ones glancing at each other shiftily, and Jeremy's wide eyes were practically burning a hole in Castor's back. *Not all of them*, Remus thought, *they can be saved, they can, they can...*

Remus Lupin. A voice popped into his head. He blinked, stunned - it was Castor. *It is not safe to speak of this here. You will join me in the forests.*

Remus looked over at Castor, who was staring blankly ahead, as always, inscrutable. He hadn't tried communicating like that before, but the pack was close enough, and the magic of the forest pressing in, so he concentrated hard.

Yes. I understand.

Castor made no sign that he had heard, so Remus just had to hope. Greyback left shortly after that, giving Remus a cruel wink as he passed,

"Your time to shine, cub." He said. Remus knew he ought to nod, or something, but he was too tense, and just stared stiffly back.

Castor announced that he was going hunting, and Remus quickly agreed to join him. Livia gave them both an appraising look.

"Do not tire yourselves, brothers. We have such games ahead of us."

They walked through the woods in silence. It was late afternoon, and quite mild for April; the sun lowering but still bright. They'd had very little rain so far this year, but that hadn't stopped the trees and plants around them from exploding into life. Everything was lush and green and bountiful, and as they approached a small clearing Remus saw that the bluebells had begun to spring up, and the woodland floor ahead of them was carpeted in a glorious haze of soft mauve.

"Won't you miss this?" Castor asked, quietly. He obviously judged them far enough away from Greyback.

"Yes." Remus replied. He meant it. He had hated nature all his life - even the forbidden forest. He loved London; the concrete and pollution and the noise. But the past month had changed him, and he knew how much he would miss the peace and quiet, and feeling so close to the earth.

"But your time with us grows short." Castor said. "I think perhaps all our time is short, now." He sighed heavily, and looked at Remus with completely human eyes; grey and penitent, "I am ready to defy my father."

"Do you mean -- will you help me?"

"We shall help each other. For the good of the pack. I have a plan, but Remus Lupin, you *must* listen to me, and you *must* obey me. I need to know that you will do what needs to be done."

"I will never kill for him." Remus said, fiercely.

"But you might kill." Castor responded, raising an eyebrow.

It wasn't a question; it was a statement. And Remus did not deny it.

* * *

Thursday 12th April 1979

There were no goodbyes, of course. Remus did not even know who was on their side - his and

Castor's. No names were spoken, he just had to have faith.

On the morning of the full moon Remus crept as far away from the pack as he could to cast his patronus. He hoped that the others wouldn't pick up on the spell, which was powerful and sure to attract attention.

He'd never sent a message via patronus before, and once again regretted the creature's fearsome size and aspect. Hopefully it wouldn't be too terrifying for Sirius to hear Remus's voice coming from the giant silver wolf's jaws. He could only manage three words. *Castle. Tomorrow. Dawn.*

And that was his escape route taken care of - if he survived the night. Castor promised - Remus made him swear on their very blood - that if Remus did not live, then he would get a message to Sirius and the Potters. There was no other way, Remus decided. He had to be there for the attack; the last time he'd warned the Order about werewolves nothing had been done. So he would have to do it himself, and damn the consequences.

Obviously, he'd prefer not to die, though.

An hour or so before moonrise, the pack apparated together. It was just as well that Remus hadn't run away to tell Moody at his first opportunity - because he had absolutely no idea where they were going. He was forced to side-along with Livia, and they landed together on a soft mossy patch of grass.

Remus wrenched his arm away from her and stared around at his new surroundings. It was such a weird place - just a flat plain of grass, a few trees, a fence - ah. He realised stupidly that they were in a park. Man-made nature. The whole place smelled human and muggle-ish. The rest of the pack were arriving around them, one by one with a **crack** and a thud.

"That's the place," Castor said, addressing everyone. He pointed over the fence to a row of houses across the road. The park was in a quiet muggle cul-de-sac. "With the green door."

Remus crept as close to the fence as he dared, and peered over at the building. Had his parents lived in a similar house, once? It looked like the sort of place Hope belonged.

It was a small, detached house. The front door was a cheerful shade of green, and the porch light glowed soft amber in the twilight. Remus could make out the silhouette of someone moving in one of the upstairs windows - the pale pink blind was drawn down, so he could only see shadows. That must be the child's room, he thought with a terrible wave of nausea.

He couldn't let this happen. He wouldn't. If he had to kill Livia. If he had to die himself, he wouldn't let-- *wait a minute* .

A gust of wind blew a scent in his direction. One he recognised. He sniffed the air again. What *was* that? Someone he knew? It smelled almost like Sirius, *almost* , but not quite. Old blood; old magic. A relative? Not Regulus, he wouldn't be caught dead on a street this muggle-ish. Nor either of their parents. It was feminine too, it was more like Narcissa, or... surely not Andromeda??

He couldn't be sure, he'd only met her once, when he was thirteen. But she had a daughter. A daughter who would be about five or six, now. Heart pounding, Remus desperately wanted to get closer, to find out more.

Then, in an amazing stroke of luck, the green door opened, letting light out into the street. A man stepped out, carrying a shiny black bin bag. He walked to the end of the garden path, opened the dustbin lid, dropped the bag inside, then returned to the house.

It was Ted Tonks.

No, no no , Remus thought to himself - if something happened to Andromeda, to her little girl... Sirius would never forgive him. Remus didn't know if he would forgive himself.

"Remus!" Castor whispered from the bushes behind him, "It is almost time."

Remus turned and nodded. He hoped this would work. He'd never been so close to praying in his life. A stab of pain shot through his back. The moon was rising.

He backed into the park, where a few of the others had curled up on the ground, preparing for the agonies of transformation.

Remus looked at Castor, standing beside him. It was a peculiar sensation - he had transformed in front of the marauders before, but never with others who were experiencing the same thing. Castor caught his eye, and seeming to understand at once, reached out his hand.

Remus took it, gratefully, and gripped it hard, clenching his teeth as the pain swept through him. Castor gripped back, sharing his suffering, but also lending strength. They both fell to their knees at the same time, and Remus remembered no more.

The wolf stretched its limbs and sniffed at the night air. Pack. Prey. Magic.

He rolled over in the grass, pleased to be free, unencumbered by human worries.

His pack mate nudged him, huffing softly, and he remembered - he had something to do. This was not a night for playing, or for hunting.

The she-wolf, and the one that hated him both snapped at the others, and the young ones ducked their heads, lowered their haunches.

But he would not - he was not a cub; he was full grown. He was strong as them.

The pack-mate with the scarred nose smelled good, he was strong too. He growled at the others, so the wolf did too; puffing up his body and showing all his teeth so that they knew.

The scarred one gave out a bark, then, and turned away, running for the trees. Some of the others followed, confused.

The dark wolf, the wolf who hated him, snarled and leapt at the scarred one, onto his back. They grappled, turning over in the grass growling and snapping.

The she-wolf watched. She sat, and yawned. She need not involve herself.

The rest of the pack watched avidly, panting and yapping as blood was drawn.

He wanted to help, to jump in and start biting - but the scarred one needed to win it himself. It was his fight.

The scent in the air changed, and the she-wolf stood, ears up, tail swishing.

A human.

They had been heard. She began to stalk towards the fence, hunting, as the stupid human shouted

in its stupid human language.

Not quite knowing why, he howled, long and as loud as he could.

The she-wolf whipped around, growling fiercely at him, pulling rank, but he howled again.

The human retreated, fast. They knew now. They would bring back others. He had endangered the pack.

The she-wolf barked at the dark one, but he was already pinned to the ground by the scarred one. Victory. The young wolves looked up to the scarred one now, sniffing at him and lowering their heads.

The scarred one barked, then climbed off the dark one. He turned and began to walk away. Some followed. The pack divided.

The she-wolf ran after the scarred one, to bring him back, to restore order. But she would not catch them. They were a new pack now; unless she killed the scarred one they would not follow anyone else.

He wanted to go too. He wanted to run with them forever, and be their leader, and chase deer through the dark nights...

But no. He had to do this first. He had to protect... to protect... what was it? It was so hard to think, when the delicious scent of human meat was so close; coming in on all sides.

The dark one limped to its feet. Remus growled. It snarled back at him, jaws frothing, eyes baleful.

He remembered, now. Protect the pack. He pounced, jaws wide and claws bared.

* * *

All he knew was pain, pain and blood, as Remus's body pulled itself back into its human shape. He screamed, and Gaius's blood ran down his gullet, rich and warm. It was in his teeth, under his tongue, it was everywhere, and Gaius's body lay there, limp and pale, throat dark and glistening.

There was no time for shock. The moon was setting, and people were coming, and Remus wasn't even fully human yet, but there was no time! He squeezed his eyes shut, gritted his teeth, and apparated.

CRACK

He landed flat on his face with a hard grunt. His ankle cracked sickeningly against a rock. He gasped, rolling into a ball, tears springing in his eyes as he vowed never to apparate right after a transformation ever again.

His whole foot throbbed, shooting all the way up his shin, making him feel giddy. He was still sticky with blood and without any clothes all he could do was curl up in pain on the grass. Was he even in Cornwall?! He couldn't tell; where was the castle?!

"Fuck!" He sobbed, exhausted and defeated.

"Moony?!" A shout came up from over the side of the hill.

Remus rolled onto his back and closed his eyes, so relieved he thought he'd faint.

“Sirius!” He called back, as the heavy footsteps pounded closer.

And then he was there, and *oh god* Remus just about fell apart. Sirius threw his cloak over him and pulled him close and wrapped his arms around him. Remus clutched him back, trembling, the pain in his leg now threatening to overwhelm him.

“You came back!” Sirius gasped, voice shrill, “You came back!”

“Of course I did...” Remus said, woozily.

“Are you bleeding?!”

“Not my blood...” and then everything was going dark around the edges, and he was so exhausted he closed his eyes. And nothing more.

The War: Moony's Story

Chapter Summary

No serious warnings, but minor character death.

He came to in a small white room, with a low ceiling striped with black beams. There was a little square window, but the curtains were drawn over. Someone had washed the blood off him, thank goodness, though he could still smell it, faintly, and taste it too. He was lying in a single bed, and other than a little bedside table with an old lamp on it, there wasn't much else in the room.

The door was slightly ajar, and Remus could hear voices in the corridor outside.

"Marlene's here," James's voice came through clearly, "Should I let her up? Did you ask him any questions?!"

"Yeah, send her up. He's not awake..." Sirius said, his voice sounding odd. "But it's definitely him. Has to be."

"You're sure?!"

"The first thing he said when he landed was 'fuck', I'm pretty certain." Sirius snapped.

"Fair." James replied, without humour. He lowered his voice to a whisper, "Padfoot... all that blood. And with the attack last night--"

"Let's just see what he has to say, before we jump to any conclusions, shall we?! Send Marlene up."

"But if it's not *safe*."

"Then I'll stay in the bloody room. Can we please just get someone to *look* at him, for fuck's sake?! He hasn't even got a wand!"

"Ok, ok..." James relented.

God, Remus thought, as shame settled over him like dust. *They think I'm not me. They think I'm a spy*. How bad had the war become, in the month he'd been away? He racked his brain quickly for a way to prove his identity. The thought of Sirius not trusting him was too painful to bear.

There was a mess of footsteps in the hall outside, and finally the door opened. Remus tried to sit up at once, pulling himself up by his arms as Sirius entered the room,

"Padfoot, I swear it's me, it's Moony! I helped you make the marauders map, and we put rose hips in Snivellus' bed, and we went skating on the lake at Christmas and I hated it but you were really good, and... and..."

"Shh, Moony," Sirius soothed, sitting on the bed carefully and placing gentle hands on his shoulder, "Lie down for fuck's sake, Godric knows what you broke apparating like that you silly sod..."

“You know it's me?!” Remus gripped Sirius's arms, but allowed himself to be put back to bed.

“Of course I do.” Sirius leaned over and kissed his forehead, “I'd know you anywhere. Look, sorry about Prongs, he's just on edge. Things have just been a bit...”

“All right, all right, give him some room!”

Sirius whipped around as Marlene stormed into the room, green Healer's robes flying and leather bag in hand.

She shoved Sirius off the bed and leaned over Remus, laying a cool hand on his forehead and looking in his eyes, her freckled face full of sweet concern. She smiled,

“Hello sweetheart,” she said softly, “Where have you been, eh? You've had us all worried sick.”

“Hi Marlene,” Remus smiled back fondly. “Did you qualify as a Healer while I was gone?”

“Hardly,” she laughed, “Still very much a novice. But I'm the best the Order could do at short notice so...” She straightened up, hands on her hips, “Right. What's the damage?”

“Hurt my ankle,” Remus reached down to pull up the blanket over his sore foot. It looked awful in the light of day, all swollen and black with bruising. Sirius covered his mouth, but Marlene just tutted,

“Easy enough.” She tapped it with her wand, and Remus felt a funny ticklish feeling before *pop* - and it was as good as new. “You'll still need to rest,” Marlene cautioned.

“You're a legend, Marls,” Remus said gratefully, and then began to cough, that rough raspy bark he'd almost got used to now. “Sorry,” he spluttered, eyes watering, “Got a bit of a cough.”

Sirius was wincing, and looked more distressed than ever, hand still over his mouth. Marlene pulled down the bedsheets and lay her head directly on Remus's bare chest, listening.

“‘Bit of a cough' my arse.” She tutted, surfacing, “You've got a stonking great chest infection, is what.”

She began emptying her bag, pulling out ointments and potion bottles, “I'll have to ask someone at St Mungo's what's best for that, I haven't done infections yet... now... Madam Pomfrey asked me to make sure you got this, it's her own sleeping draught. I'm working on one myself, but hers will be stronger...”

“Don't give it to him yet!” Suddenly James was in the room, starting forward with his arm out. Everyone turned to look at him, and he rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly, “Er... sorry. It's just that I've finally got hold of Mad-Eye and he's on his way...”

“It's fine,” Remus said to the room.

Marlene tutted again. She set the potion bottle down on the bedside table.

“One of you make sure he drinks the whole thing as soon as possible, ok?” She gave James and Sirius a severe look, and they both nodded earnestly. “I have to go to work before I'm missed.” She said, straightening up once more.

She squeezed Remus's hand. “So happy to have you back, darling.”

He squeezed back, feeling a bit better about everything. They cared about him. He was safe with

them. He lay back on his pillow and tried to focus on that feeling.

James and Sirius stood about awkwardly.

“Hi Prongs,” Remus tried, a bit wary.

“Hiya Moony,” James smiled, his eyes tired and dark, “You all right?”

“Felt worse.”

James made a sound that wasn’t quite a laugh.

“Where are we, anyway?” Remus asked, looking around at the pokey little room.

“Cornwall.” Sirius said. “Remember the pub near the castle? Rented a room. You were... when you got here, I didn’t want to move you. Seemed like the best place. Out of the way.”

“Does anyone else know--”

“No.” James said. “Only us, Marlene and Moody. It’s been... things have been hard, and with the attack last night, we thought--”

“Attack?!” Remus sat up again, as the events of the night before came flooding back in a riot of blood and teeth and hair. “Shit, what happened?! Did anyone... was anyone...”

“Not on our side.” Sirius said.

That didn’t make Remus feel any better, but he tried to look happy about it. He couldn’t let his friends know just how blurry the lines between ‘our side’ and ‘their side’ had become for him.

“Moony,” James started. “Last night, were you there--?”

The door swung open once more, creaking loudly, and Alastor Moody came hobbling into the room, his face set with a look of grim determination. James and Sirius backed out of the way, as Mad-Eye approached Remus’s bed. Remus’s first instinct was to duck under his blankets and hide like a little kid.

“Lupin.” Moody nodded, his electric blue magical eye whirring in its socket, giving him a very thorough once-over. “You made it back, then.”

“Yeah.” Remus croaked.

Moody held his wand up, pointing it in Remus’s face.

“Oi!” Sirius started, but James held out an arm to stop him.

Moody fixed Remus with a very serious gaze.

“Mother’s maiden name?”

“J-Jenkins!” Remus stuttered, terrified. Moody nodded, and lowered his wand.

“No offence,” he said, glancing at Sirius, “Protocol.”

“Right.” Remus swallowed, heart pounding.

“How are you? Been seen to?”

"Marlene was here a minute ago," James said. "She'll be back later."

"No one else, do you hear?" Moody said, "Not until I say so. We need to limit his exposure for now, until the furor's died down." He waved his wand, and a chair appeared from thin air. Moody sat down, and looked at Remus once more. "Potter, Black, you can go."

"No." Sirius said, raising his chin. His defiant look hadn't changed since he was eleven. "I'm not going anywhere."

Moody gave him another look, his tongue playing in the corner of his mouth.

"Fine." He grunted. "But keep your mouth shut. I don't want to hear a peep, got it?"

"I um. I'd better go." James said, rubbing the back of his head again, "Sorry Moony, I need to get home..."

"Of course." Remus said, though he didn't really understand. Did James no longer trust him?

James said something to Sirius before leaving, but Remus didn't catch it, and didn't try to eavesdrop. He was too busy holding his nerve against Moody.

He wasn't up to a battle of wills, not after the last few weeks. Now that he knew the building they were in was muggle, he felt the absence of magic more keenly. He'd been used to the enchanted forest, with its unending pool of shared power. Back in the real world, everything felt so mundane. He felt weaker than ever, and began to cough again.

James left, and Sirius handed Remus a glass of water.

"This can't take too long." Sirius said to Moody, "He's supposed to rest, after a full moon, Marlene said--"

"Not a peep, Black." Moody snapped, his blue eye fixing Sirius with a hard stare, the normal, brown one still watching Remus.

Sirius was quiet, but he was clearly not happy about it. He folded his arms petulantly, and looked away. Remus felt a rush of love for him, the spoilt brat.

"I was there, last night." Remus said, quickly, to get things moving. He thought it was probably best to be as honest as possible from the beginning. "I was at the Tonks house, I know what happened - well, most of it - was anyone... did anyone...?"

"One body recovered." Moody said. "One of Greyback's."

"Gaius." Remus said. He wasn't sure how he felt. He'd killed somebody.

"Let's not start there." Moody said, watching his face, "I want to start at the beginning. Where have you been for the past month? Leave nothing out."

Remus was weak and exhausted and sore, but he was not an idiot. He left plenty out. But he also said a lot more than was probably safe. He didn't look at Sirius the whole time; he knew that would make things impossible.

He explained how the pack had kidnapped him, and locked him up for a week and a half. How he'd finally met with Greyback - he heard Sirius breathe in sharply at this, but Moody's expression didn't even flicker. He told them most of the things Greyback had said, though he knew none of it

was useful to anyone except him. He confirmed that the pack had been working with Voldemort, keeping the old families scared enough to stay loyal.

“You were imprisoned the whole time?” Moody asked.

“I... no.” Remus twisted his mouth, nervously. “They broke my wand, but... I could have left any time. I didn’t because I thought... well, I knew it was only a matter of time before they planned an attack, and I wanted to learn as much as I could.”

He kept his voice steady the whole time, and hoped he was still a convincing liar. Moody did not comment.

“And the attack?”

“Right, yeah.” Remus nodded. “I had to go with them, because Cas-- one of the other werewolves, he was planning to break from the pack. He wanted to be peaceful, to get away from Greyback. He was my ally.” Remus felt Sirius’s eyes on him, and hoped it was all in his head. “So I helped him, and he helped me. He led the others away, and I stayed back to stop anyone from trying to attack the house.”

“While you were a wolf?”

“Yes. I can think better, when there are other wolves there. I tried to warn Mr and Mrs Tonks, I howled, so they’d know they were in danger.”

“Ah. So that was you.” Moody nodded, “Ted said something about that.”

“You’ve seen them? Are they ok?!”

“Shaken up, but no harm done.” Moody gave a curt nod. “How many of Greyback’s pack have defected?”

“I don’t know. At least half? Maybe there are only four or five left who are loyal.”

“Good to know. Can you give me names?”

“They didn’t use any names.” Another lie, but he just couldn’t do it.

“Right.” Moody nodded. He watched Remus for a bit longer. Then he sniffed and stood up. “Lie low for a bit, eh? I’ll be in touch.” He turned to leave.

“Wait!” Remus reached out. Moody turned back, a curious look on his face. Remus bit his lip.

“The body.” He said. “Gaius. That was me. I killed him.”

Saying it out loud made it distressingly real. He felt queasy, and didn’t think he’d be able to look Sirius in the eye ever again. Moody kept looking at him. He tilted his head.

“While you were a wolf?”

“Yeah.”

“And he was a wolf? Trying to attack a young family?”

“Yeah, but--”

“This is a war, Lupin. Get some rest. Don’t dwell on it.”

And he left, and that was it. Everything Remus had put himself through for almost thirty days, boiled down to a few key tactical points. He fidgeted with the blanket. It was old, and bobbly, and reminded him of the rough army-style blankets he'd grown up with. Sirius was still standing by, watching him, but Remus couldn't look up, he just couldn't.

Thankfully, Sirius broke the silence first.

"Got your patronus. Bloody hell, where did you learn to do that?"

"Oh," Remus nodded, still looking down, "Yeah, I dunno, I'd seen Ferox do it once."

"Without your wand?"

"I didn't need it, not always..."

"Oh."

More silence. And then -- "I missed you so fucking much!" Sirius burst out, with such force and passion that Remus finally looked up at him. His eyes were wide, and shimmering with tears. He looked as exhausted as Remus felt, and Remus realised that he must have been up all night, too.

"I missed you too!"

Sirius bolted towards Remus, arms out, but hung back at the last moment,

"Can I... is it ok?"

Remus nodded, reaching for him, and Sirius came over and enveloped him in a hug that went on for long, wonderful minutes. Remus felt as if he'd finally been given permission to exhale, and he closed his eyes and felt the warm, comforting weight of Sirius against him.

"I'm sorry," Remus whispered into Sirius's hair, "I'm so, so sorry I was gone so long."

Sirius pulled away finally, wiping his eyes briskly,

"You'd better have this potion." He reached for the bottle and uncorked it.

"Thanks," Remus said, too tired to argue. He took the potion and gulped it down in a few seconds.

"Shall I let you rest?" Sirius asked, anxiously. Remus shook his head vehemently,

"No, please stay? Will you lie here with me, for a bit?"

"There's not much room..."

"Calling me fat?" Remus poked his tongue out, shuffling aside to make space. Sirius grinned at him, and lay down.

He put an arm gently across Remus's shoulder, and they lay on their sides facing each other.

"Does James hate me?" Remus asked, finally.

"What?" Sirius frowned. Oh god, he was so beautiful this close up, how had Remus forgotten?

"No, of course not. He's got a lot on his mind. His parents aren't well."

"Oh no, what's wrong?!"

“I think they’re just old.” Sirius said, sadly. “The war... it's been so much harder, lately.”

“Please tell me.”

“You should sleep.”

“Please?”

Sirius sighed. He looked down, then back up, and his eyes were shining once more.

“We lost the Prewetts. Gid and Fab.”

“No!”

“It was awful. Five Death Eaters. *Five* .”

“I can’t believe it. Is Molly ok?”

“I don’t think any of us are.”

“Oh Sirius.” Remus hugged him again. “I wish I could have been with you...”

“I thought...” Sirius shut his eyes, then shook his head, hair rustling against the pillow. “No, never mind, it's over now. You're here. You’re safe.”

“I’m here.” Remus repeated, feeling the sleeping draught start to kick in. Sirius stroked his hair gently.

“Remus...”

“Mm,” Remus shifted, making himself more comfortable, “Please call me Moony? No one has for so long.”

“Moony.” Sirius leaned forward and kissed his cheek very gently. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” Remus smiled, slipping into a warm and happy dream.

The War: Late Spring 1979

Chapter Summary

Warnings:

There's a brief suggestion of alcohol dependency in this chapter, as well as a mention of cancer and the death of close family members.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I would say I'm sorry

If I thought that it would change your mind

But I know that this time

I have said too much

Been too unkind

I try to laugh about it

Cover it all up with lies

I try and laugh about it

Hiding the tears in my eyes

Because boys don't cry

Boys don't cry

They stayed in the room above the pub for two more nights. Marlene came back on the first evening, as good as her word, and brought a potion for Remus's chest infection. She prescribed rest, but the next day Remus was going mad from being cooped up, so he and Sirius caught the bus to the beach.

It was too cool for swimming, being April, so they just walked. It was very quiet out of the tourist season, so it was ok to hold hands, too, for a little bit.

Remus closed his eyes and breathed in the sea air, smiling. The sky was grey, threatening rain, but wind was fresh on his face, and he felt better.

"When we get home," Sirius said brightly, "We'll go to Ollivander's to get you a new wand."

"Great." Remus nodded. He hadn't done any magic since he'd been back. Didn't trust himself.

“That’s if Mary’ll hold off on your welcome home party,” Sirius chuckled, “She was going bonkers worrying. I think she must still have a thing for you.”

“Ha.” Remus replied.

“And Lily, obviously. She really wants to tell you something, but she said to wait until we’re all in the same room.”

“Mm.”

“Can’t wait for everything to be back to normal. Back to being marauders, eh?”

“Yeah.”

“D’you remember what sort of wand Lyall had? Maybe you can get the same one again.”

“Nope.”

“Moony?”

“Mm?”

“Are you ok?”

“Yeah.”

Sirius was quiet after that, and Remus felt guilty. After his brusque de-briefing with Moody, Remus hadn’t been in a very talkative mood. He was too anxious to say very much - he didn’t know what Sirius might think of him. And on top of that, Remus was struggling more than he thought he would, being away from the pack. He was thrilled to be back with Sirius, of course. But at the same time, he felt he was missing something.

He didn’t want Sirius to worry, so he did his best to be normal.

“So nice to be outside.” He commented as they walked.

“Are you sure you’re Moony?!” Sirius teased, pretending to be affronted, “*My* Moony hates going outside...”

“Well spend a week locked in a dungeon and tell me how *you* feel about fresh air.” Remus muttered.

Sirius stopped and looked at him, his mouth slightly open, expression hurt. “Sorry.” Remus said, guiltily. He took Sirius’s hand again. “I didn’t mean that.”

He’d been doing that a lot, since he got back. Snapping. The smallest thing might set him off, and Sirius was bearing the brunt.

“It’s ok.” Sirius replied, shakily. “I shouldn’t make fun of you. After everything.”

“No, I don’t want... you shouldn’t have to treat me like I’m fragile, or something. I just need to get over it, it’s my fault.”

Sirius didn’t say anything for a long time. Remus fought to urge to probe his mind, as the werewolves had taught him to do. He didn’t know if it worked on non-werewolves, but he did know that Sirius had extremely strong feelings about having his private thoughts invaded.

“You don’t have to ‘get over it’.” Sirius said, finally. “But it might help to talk.”

“About what?”

“What happened, in the pack.”

“I’ve talked about that already; I’ve told Moody everything. You were there.”

“Remus.” Sirius raised his voice slightly. “Come on. You didn’t tell him *everything*. I know you.”

“Everything important to the war effort.” Remus said, firmly.

“So nothing else happened then?!” Sirius let go of Remus’s hand, because his own hands were suddenly in the air, gesturing wildly. “They just locked up up, then let you go, and it was all *fine* ??”

“Obviously not.” Remus folded his arms, suddenly feeling the chill. “But no one wants to hear about things like that.”

“Maybe I want to hear.”

“Here we go.” Remus rolled his eyes, “Well then? What do you want to hear?!”

“Why did you go in the first place? Why didn’t you come back to me?”

“I knew it.” Remus said, tightening his arms around his body, “You’re angry with me!”

“I’m not, I’m just...”

“That’s what you meant, wasn’t it?! The night I got back!”

“What are you talking about?!”

“You know! ‘*You came back*’ that’s what you said! You thought I wasn’t going to! You thought I’d left for good!” Remus was shouting, all of a sudden, and he wasn’t sure how he’d got so angry, but now it was just burning him up.

“Of course I didn’t!” Sirius shouted back, “I just... I just didn’t know *what* to think! Do you know what it was like for me?? You just disappeared, and no one would let me look for you, and fucking Ferox wouldn’t tell me anything, and James was a mess with his parents getting sick, and the fucking Prewetts...”

Sirius didn’t shout often, not as often as Remus anyway, and his voice got very high very quickly, suddenly sounding incredibly posh and haughty. This just riled Remus up even more.

“Oh *poor you* ! Jesus, I thought you’d got over this spoilt brat routine by now! We’re not twelve anymore Black!”

Sirius’s mouth fell open now, utterly affronted. Remus felt more alive than he had in days, but he wasn’t ever going to admit it. He just kept shouting, shattering the peace of the empty beach, voice ringing against dark wet sand.

“I’m sorry if I’m not like you, I don’t want to whinge about every unpleasant thing that happens to me!”

“Like what?!” Sirius yelled, cheeks red, and eyes bright, so that for a moment Remus questioned

whether Sirius was enjoying this just as much as he was, “Go on, if I’m so selfish and terrible, please enlighten me on the true nature of noble suffering, Remus, I know that’s your speciality!”

“Oh *up yours* !”

“Well? Why *didn’t* you come back?!”

“Because they were fucking with my head!” Remus practically screamed this, the waves seemed to crash louder and seagulls cried overhead in answer.

He was ablaze, filled with words that came tumbling out of him as soon as he thought them,

“Because I never felt like that before - they were my family, and we were all the same, we were all at home there, and it was... it felt like the only place in the world I was meant to be! All that, it was all that except...” and now tears were coming, scalding hot, “Except *he* was there, that fucking... that monster. He was so evil, so... and I was scared, and I wanted to come home, to you, I *did*, but I couldn’t just leave them with a man like that. And they could... they could *do* things I didn’t know I could do, they taught me... And I just didn’t know who I was anymore.”

He wiped his face, the tears dripping off his chin. He looked Sirius in the eye. “I don’t know who I am.”

They stared each other out, as the echoes subsided. Remus was breathing heavily, his cheeks hot, but he felt *good*. Relieved.

Finally, Sirius spoke. He put his hands in his pockets and squinted around, off into the distance. He smiled,

“Why is it always this beach eh?”

“What?” Remus blinked, caught off guard. Sirius looked at him, eyes twinkling.

“Why is this the beach where we have all the big revelations?”

“Maybe we’re just dramatic.”

“How *very dare* you!” Sirius was smirking, and Remus laughed, despite himself. “Well?” Sirius said, “Feel better?”

“Yeah. Oi, wait a minute, did you just deliberately try to piss me off??”

“No...” Sirius looked away again, piously, “Not at first...”

“Dickhead.”

“It worked.”

Remus didn’t respond, because he really did feel better, and he didn’t want to fight again. They kept walking, and eventually reached roughly the spot where they had all camped out two years ago. The wind was kicking up, sweeping across the grassy sand dunes, and the campsite was empty. It didn’t look like the same place.

“Think we’ll ever come back here?” Remus asked, hands deep in his pockets to stop his coat flapping in the breeze.

“I hope so.” Sirius replied. “It’s my patronus thought, this place.”

“Is it?” Remus looked at him, surprised.

“Haven’t had any better summers yet.”

“Fair point.”

“Oi, look!” Sirius wandered off towards a group of rocks, bent and picked up a big long stick. He waggled it at Remus, grinning, “Want to play fetch?”

Remus laughed,

“Go on then.”

Sirius glanced around covertly to confirm they were alone, then transformed into Padfoot. Remus was grateful - he’d done enough talking now, and it was a relief to just play with canine-Sirius for a few hours. The big black dog raced up and down the beach, chased waves, played fetch and generally had an excellent time, and on the bus back to the pub both of them fell asleep.

It wasn’t until much later that night, after dinner (*oh, how Remus had missed real food! Mashed potato! Sausages! Gravy!*), when they were getting ready for bed, that Sirius brought it up again.

Remus was yawning as he crawled under the covers, and Sirius got in beside him, quietly, turning off the bedside lamp. The bed was so narrow that Remus had to lie with his back to the wall, an arm around Sirius’s waist and a face full of silky black hair which he didn’t really mind.

“I know who you are.” Sirius whispered into the empty quiet of the dark bedroom.

“Hm?” Remus asked, sleepy and confused. Sirius pulled Remus’s hand to his mouth and kissed his fingers.

“You said you don’t know who you are any more. But I do. You’re my Moony. Always will be. Ok?”

“Ok, Padfoot.”

For now it was enough.

* * *

Moody got word to them that they could return to their flat, provided that Remus kept a low profile for a while - he didn’t specify for how long. This meant no Order meetings and no missions - he wasn’t even allowed to visit the Potters’ house. For all intents and purposes, Remus Lupin had vanished off the face of the earth a month ago and never returned.

“I bet he just wants to wait for the next full moon to get the all clear.” Sirius suggested. “Anyway, you deserve a break.”

Remus just shrugged.

“Served my purpose now, I s’pose. They don’t know what to do with me.”

“Don’t talk about yourself like that.” Sirius snapped irritably. They’d been stuck in the same tiny room for too long.

They apparated back, and Remus began to feel a bit more himself once he was really home. The flat was immaculately tidy - apparently Sirius had a lot of nervous energy while Remus was away -

but otherwise everything was as it should be.

No one was supposed to know that Remus was back, but of course James had told Lily and Peter, and Marlene had told Mary, so the first evening they were home everyone came over at once. Luckily Lily had the presence of mind to bring food, because Sirius had nothing at all in the house.

“Been eating at the Potters’.” He mumbled, bashfully.

Remus and Lily went into the kitchen to set out sausage rolls, cheese and pineapple sticks and sandwiches out on plates. Lily set down her carrier bags on the counter and flung herself at him, arms around his waist, head on his shoulder. Remus patted her gently, when he realised she was crying,

“Argh, Lily, please don’t...”

“I’m sorry!” She sobbed, her voice thick and muffled against his best woolly jumper, “I just... I didn’t think I’d ever see you again!”

“God, you’re making more of a fuss than Padfoot.”

“Not likely,” She laughed, stepping back and wiping her cheeks, “He was a complete wreck while you were gone - you wouldn’t have recognised him. I don’t think he even combed his hair.”

Remus felt a horrid stab of guilt. He didn’t want to be gloomy in front of Lily, though, so he just gave her a breezy smile and said,

“So you’ve got something to tell me?”

“Oh! Er... when everyone’s here...” Lily was blushing, and suddenly focussed very hard on chopping up carrots for the dips she’d brought.

It didn’t take much longer for Marlene and Peter to arrive, straight from work. Peter even had a briefcase now, with his initials on it. Apparently he’d been doing all right for himself at the Ministry, and Remus tried not to be too bitter about it.

Marlene insisted on giving Remus another once-over in the bedroom, checking his ankle, which was good as new, and his chest, which was much better.

“Honestly, I can’t believe you’re still smoking.” She tutted as he lit up, buttoning his shirt. “You know it kills muggles.”

“Die young and leave a pretty corpse,” he winked at her, trying not to think about Hope’s lung cancer. The fact was that smoking and drinking were the only things he felt like doing these days.

Mary burst into tears as soon as she arrived, and leapt into Remus’s arms.

“You absolute bastard!” She whispered into his neck, “I could kill you!”

“Missed you too.” Remus said, squeezing her back.

Once they were all together, James and Sirius took over as hosts, which was a relief. Remus felt suddenly very tired, and sat on the couch like a ghost, watching his friends chatter and laugh and act like nineteen year olds for once. He just smiled at them all. Smiled, and drank.

Eventually, the food was nothing but crumbs, and the booze was running low too. James, Sirius and Peter had the idea to summon beers from neighbouring flats via the window, and the girls were

trying to convince them not to, when Remus remember what Lily had said in the kitchen.

“What’s your news?”

“Oh!” Lily’s head turned sharply towards him. She was standing by the window, arms around James’s shoulders, trying to pull him away from his thieving attempts. James turned too and they shared a sheepish look.

“Everyone,” James cleared his throat, “Um. Lily and I have something to--”

“Oh Christ!” Mary said, suddenly, from where she was lounging in the armchair opposite Remus, legs flung over the arm. “Lily, I thought you were on the pill!”

“Mary!” Lily turned an even deeper shade of red, “*Not* that!”

“Phew!” Mary laughed, closing her eyes, “Because we’re not even *twenty* yet, we’re much too young to be thinking about--”

“We’re getting married!” Lily yelped, quickly, before Mary could make any further comment.

You could have heard a quill drop.

Remus blinked a few times, watching James’s face to check that it wasn’t all a big joke. But he was beaming down at Lily with so much love and pride in those soppy brown eyes of his, that Remus simply smiled to himself. *Yes*, he thought. *Of course*. Remus’s second thought was Sirius, who had been half leaning out of the window when the announcement broke. Now he spun around so fast he smacked his head on the frame.

“You what?!” He stared at James, a strange mix of surprise and displeasure plain on his face.

“Yep,” James grinned, oblivious, wrapping his arms around Lily. “She asked - and who was I to refuse?”

“*You* asked?” Marlene poked Lily, “Bloody feminist hero, Evans.”

“It was a bit more mutual than that,” Lily laughed, “We were just talking, and--”

“But we only just left school.” Sirius said, his voice dull.

“A year ago,” Peter reminded him, straightening the lapels on his green-checked blazer.

“You don’t even *live* together.” Sirius folded his arms. Remus felt trapped - these were all the warning signs that Black was getting ready for a fight - except for once it was not Remus he was fighting with.

“I’m going to move in with James’s family for a bit,” Lily said, her smile faltering as she realised that Sirius was not sharing their joy.

“Yeah, you know how much they love having her around,” James said. His voice had hardened, and he kept his arms around Lily as if protecting her. “She’s been amazing while they’ve not been well.”

“Have you really thought about this though?!”

“I’m sure they have, Black, chill out.” Mary said, trying to lighten the mood. She got up, “Shall I pop out and see if we can get some cheap fizz? This deserves a toast!”

“Yeah!” Marlene stood up too. She hugged Lily then kissed James on the cheek, “Congratulations you two!”

“Congratulations!” Peter raised his beer can drunkenly.

“Have you all gone mental?!” Sirius almost shouted. Remus caught the look of dismay on Lily’s face and decided that was enough. He stood up.

“Padfoot.” he said, firmly, using *that* voice, “ *No* .”

Sirius glared at him now. His mouth shut abruptly, and he tossed his head like a moody teenage girl, before pushing past them all and marching out of the room. The bedroom door slammed.

“Silly sod.” Mary said breezily. “I’ll nip out to the shop - coming Marls?”

“I’d better...” Remus jerked his head in the direction of the bedroom and followed after Sirius.

He didn’t knock, just walked right in. After all; it was his flat too. Sirius was ready for him, and started as soon as Remus closed the door behind himself.

“You can’t possibly tell me that you think this is a good idea!” He ranted, pacing the room.

“Prongs is being ridiculous! We’re too young, there’s a bloody war on, his mum and dad are ill, and he wants to have a fucking wedding?!”

“I think those all sound like good enough reasons to have a fucking wedding, actually.” Remus sighed, sitting down on the bed.

“You’re joking! We’re kids!”

“They’re in love.” Remus tried reasoning. Sirius laughed - a mean, cruel laugh -

“Oh, and *you’re* going to start waxing lyrical about love, are you Moony?!”

“Watch it.” Remus stood up, sharply, using his height to tower over Sirius. “I don’t know why you’re being such a tosser to James and Lily, but I’m not going to sit here and have you fling bitchy little comments at me.”

Sirius was about to retort, when the door swung open again, and this time James barrelled in, angrier than Remus had ever seen him.

“You dick!” He yelled, “What the fuck are you playing at?! Moony, don’t defend him!”

“I’m not!” Remus said, stepping away and crossing his arms, “I was saying the same!”

“Well?!” James rounded on Sirius again, “Want to explain yourself?!”

“No, I want you to explain yourself!” Sirius snapped, “What the fuck?! You’re getting married, just like that? I know you’ve had this mad thing for Evans since you were twelve, but bloody hell! What’s the rush?!”

“It’s not a ‘mad thing’!” James shouted, “I love her! I’ve been in love with her forever, as you well know!”

“So you have to get married all of a sudden?!”

“I *want* to get married, and it’s not sudden! We’ve been talking about it for ages.”

“First I’ve heard of it!”

“Yeah, well, I don’t have to tell you everything! I didn’t want to say anything until Moony was back.”

“What about your parents?! What do they think??” Sirius was losing steam, but obviously not willing to stop being angry yet.

“They’re thrilled, actually! They love Lily! And I thought you did too! You’re my best friend, I thought you’d be supportive!”

“Oh!” Sirius’s eyes gleamed, “Because you’ve always been so supportive of my relationships!”

James’s eyes flickered towards Remus, then back again - it was only a split second, but Remus definitely felt it. What the hell was *that* about?

“You know that’s not...” James said, fiercely, jaw clenched.

Remus took that as his cue to leave. Whatever was going on between the two of them, he didn’t want any part in it. He went straight to the kitchen and looked under the sink. There was a bottle of firewhisky he’d put there after the last party for safekeeping. He uncorked it and took a long swig.

“Remus?”

He almost choked as Lily entered the kitchen. She laughed and reached out a hand,

“Give us some, then? Mum always said never to drink alone.”

He laughed, wiping his mouth with the back of his sleeve and handing her the bottle. She drank deeply, and didn’t wince - Remus watched her with awe and thought that if you *had* to marry a girl, then she’d better be exactly like Lily Evans.

“Sorry I ruined your homecoming party.” She said, forlorn.

“You didn’t,” Remus shook his head, “Sorry about Sirius.”

“Oh, don’t be silly - you’re not his keeper.”

“He’s being a prat.”

“He’s just jealous, I knew he would be.” She laughed, catching Remus’s look, “Not like *that*, Moony, it’s obvious he’s madly in love with you, I mean he’s worried he’s going to lose his best friend.”

“You’re probably right.”

“I’m usually right.” She raised an eyebrow at him, and he laughed again.

“Congratulations,” he said, sincerely, this time. “I think it’s brilliant.”

“Thanks, love,” she smiled softly. “It is a bit rushed, I know - my parents went spare; Pet was only married last year, and she’s three years older than me. But... you know Euphemia and Monty aren’t well?”

“Yeah, I wish I could go and see them, but... Moody’s orders, y’know.”

“They understand.” She touched his arm gently, “Anyway, they’re really... I mean, they’re not suffering or anything, but they’re very old. I knew how much it meant to James - having them see him with me. They want to know he’ll be ok when they’re gone.”

Maybe he’d had too much to drink, but tears pricked in Remus’s eyes unexpectedly. He covered his face and groaned,

“Jesus Christ, Evans, can I have five minutes without an emotional breakdown?!”

She laughed and hugged him again,

“Lovely boy.”

“We’ve baa-ack!” Mary and Marlene sang as they stumbled into the flat once more, giggling merrily.

“Hide that, quick!” Lily gave Remus his bottle back, and he stowed it back under the sink behind a box of laundry powder.

By the time Mary had poured everyone a glass (or a mug) of babycham (“the closest thing to champagne you can get in Soho after midnight”), James and Sirius had re-emerged from the bedroom, both still red faced, but apparently on better terms. Sirius joined in the toast, at least, and even gave Lily a polite kiss on the cheek.

Still, the atmosphere had changed, and everyone left within the next hour or so - Marlene was staying over at Mary’s in Croydon, Peter went back with James and Lily. When the door closed for the last time at one in the morning, Remus felt like curling up on the couch, covering his head and staying there for a week.

Sirius didn’t say much, just did a bit of perfunctory tidying up, then went to the bathroom. Remus heard the lock click shut and took the opportunity for one last glass of whisky and a cigarette before bed. He felt grimy; his teeth were furry, his throat scorched and his eyes itching, but it suited his mood.

He didn’t feel like talking anymore; especially if it led to another fight. He even considered just falling asleep on the couch. But then - that might just mean a fight in the morning, and he already knew he was going to be hungover then. Only one thing for it.

Sirius unclicked the door and Remus heard him padding through to the bedroom. Maybe if Remus took his time brushing his teeth Sirius would doze off before he got there - they’d both had a lot to drink. He hoisted himself off the couch and headed for the bathroom.

Remus washed his face and the back of his neck in cold water, and stared at himself in the medicine cabinet mirror above the sink. He’d been avoiding his reflection since he got back. He looked like shit; still too hollow in the cheeks, eyes darker and wider somehow. He was pale from too much drink and his scars stood out like silver wires under his skin.

Did he have that same haunted look that they had; the pack? Had he caught that feral glint, that rangy wolfish smirk? Or was he just seeing the angry, frightened care home kid that has always been there?

He sighed, defeated, and flicked off the light, going to bed at last.

The lights were still on, and Sirius was under the covers, only his silky black hair visible, draped over the pillow. He always slept like that; hidden. With a flash of clarity Remus was reminded of

the child Sirius had once been; alone in a big house full of family who couldn't understand him, the weight of expectation pressing in on all sides.

Remus turned his loneliness inwards; always had. But Sirius - he pushed his loneliness *out* , and let other people take it from him. So he got a bit possessive sometimes, a bit panicky - so what? Nobody was perfect. Softening, Remus got in beside him and very gently stroked Sirius's hair.

"All right?" He whispered.

Sirius's head bobbed in a sort of nod under the duvet, and he reached out to wind his arms around Remus's waist. Remus sighed, relieved. It felt so good to be back in his own bed. They could always just *not fight* , he thought to himself. "Love you," he murmured, kissing the top of Sirius's head.

Sirius's arms grew tighter around him, and soon enough they both fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics are from 'Boys Don't Cry' by The Cure

The War: Summer 1979

Chapter Summary

CW gory war stuff, as well as Black family trauma.

Chapter Notes

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: The lyrics used in this chapter are from a song called 'Rex's Blues', which was written/performed in 1977 by Townes Van Zandt. So it counts as an era appropriate song for this fic - BUT, the version which I first heard, and which I had in mind when writing this chapter is by Jolie Holland.

Ride the blue wind, high and free

She'll lead you down through misery

Leave you low, come time to go

Alone and low, as low can be.

Lily and James's wedding was set for late September. It was going to be a relatively small affair - order members and school friends, mostly - and it would be held at the Potters' estate. They were hoping the weather would be nice enough to have it in the gardens, but even if it rained there was plenty of room indoors.

After making such a fuss on the night of Remus's homecoming, Sirius was clearly very embarrassed by how he'd acted, and made up for it by doing pretty much anything James and Lily asked of him. He ordered dress robes for the boys in Madam Malkin's, went to pick up the rings from the jeweller, and offered his entire record collection up for use at the reception.

Remus, who had never been to a wedding, tried to stay well back. As far as he knew, his duty as groomsman was to show up, keep Sirius's head from exploding, and make sure none of Lily's muggle family saw anything too scarring.

Sirius's most bonkers act of contrition was to hand-write all of the invitations. His talent for calligraphy was still one of Sirius's darkest secrets, (and Remus's favourite thing to tease him about) but he was determined to be the perfect Best Man, so he sat hunched over the dining table one afternoon and worked at it for a solid four hours.

"Fifty-eight!" Sirius said, triumphantly, finishing the last invitation with a flourish of his quill.

"Well done," Remus said, glancing over the top of his newspaper, "Ahh, look at your pretty handwriting! So dainty!"

“Better than your chicken-scratch!” Sirius poked his tongue out.

“Just don’t tell anyone you did them,” Remus advised, “Or you’ll start getting requests.”

“Do you really think they’re that good?” Sirius asked, holding one up to the light to inspect the delicate whorls of black ink.

“They’re gorgeous. Really.” Remus said, fondly.

“Well, this is the only time I’m doing it,” Sirius sniffed, tidying up the pile, “This is the one and only wedding I will ever support.”

“What if Mary got married? Or Pete?”

“I’d show up and get drunk, but secretly I would hate every minute.”

“Very reasonable,” Remus nodded.

“Another thing you can blame the noble and most ancient house of *cack* for.” Sirius said, “Do you know how many engagement dinners and weddings I’ve been to? Ugh.” He shuddered visibly. “So I’m sorry, Moony, but you’ll never make an honest man of me.”

“Oh, and I was just about to propose,” Remus said dryly, getting up, “Tea?”

“Please.” Sirius nodded, rubbing his sore knuckles.

Remus entered the kitchen, tapping the kettle with his wand - they’d gone to get it the same day as the dress robes. It had reminded Remus a bit of going to get his school shoes as a boy; Ollivander measured him and then hummed and ahed and muttered to himself under his breath. He’d rummaged about in the stock room and bought out box after box of wands for Remus to try. Eventually they’d settled on a flexible cypress number, with a unicorn hair core.

He’d been trying to get used to it. It wasn’t the same as Lyall’s wand (which he’d found out had been blackthorn, with a kelpie hair core) - it seemed less rigid, more inclined to do what Remus told it. Which meant that Remus had to remember not to put too much force behind his magic, as he’d grown used to doing.

He watched the steam rising from the kettle spout thoughtfully.

“It would really piss them off, though,” Remus called through the thin wall.

“What? Who?”

“Your family.” Remus said, plonking two tea bags into two mugs, “If you married a bloke. A half-blood, werewolf, bloke.”

“Don’t forget poor!” Sirius laughed. “Merlin, just imagine sending my mother an invitation to that!”

“Imagine sending *anyone* an invitation to that,” Remus snorted, “Christ, I can already hear James making horrible puns about the honey *moon*.” He carried the mugs of tea back through to the living room, setting them down on the coffee table.

“I’ve already been engaged once, I really don’t fancy doing it again.” Sirius said, with an air of finality.

“Oh yeah, you’re welcome for that.” Remus winked.

* * *

Well, if I had a nickel, I'd find a game

If I won a dollar, I'd make it rain

If it rained an ocean, I'd drink it dry

And lay me down dissatisfied.

It's legs to walk and thoughts to fly

Eyes to laugh and lips to cry

A restless tongue to classify

All born to grow and grown to die

The wedding planning was actually a very welcome distraction, as the summer opened up before them. Sirius, James, Peter and Lily were often called out urgently for order missions, and the list of missing read out at the beginning of every meeting was growing longer.

Benjy Fenwick, who had been working with Moody for years was horribly murdered - they couldn’t even have a casket at his funeral; there wasn’t enough of him left. Darius Barebones - who Remus had never liked, but who was nonetheless a dedicated agent - was found flayed alive in his own office at the ministry. They were miserable times.

Remus was finally allowed to return to the Order officially after two full moons had passed without incident. Ferox believed that the split Castor had instigated meant that Greyback’s pack was too weak to be much use to Voldemort - and somehow everyone had got the idea that Remus was responsible for this.

Dumbledore actually shook his hand, saying, “You’ve done us all so proud, Mr Lupin.”

Danny McKinnon had even apologised to him - Remus thought that was probably Marlene’s doing.

By July, the Order’s numbers had dwindled so much that even Remus was getting sent out - and he was often paired with Mary, which made things bearable. Their general orders were to backup Aurors by standing guard, or managing surveillance on some of the better known death eaters. Remus and Mary spent a lot of time sitting in cafes together, or hiding behind bushes.

One such mission involved following a death eater called Travers, who was known to drink at a wizard’s pub near Stoke Mandeville. They were just supposed to see where he went; how he spent an average day. Caradoc Dearborn, a hero of the Order of the Phoenix, had last been seen entering the pub, but no one had heard from him since.

“You came back,” Mary whispered, as they waited in the backseat of an ancient Ford Cortina, parked across the road. “So maybe Caradoc will too.”

“I hope so.” Remus replied.

“I just can’t bear not knowing.” Mary’s leg was shaking nervously, “I keep imagining... and what

they did to the Prewetts!”

“Don’t think about it.” He put a hand on her knee to keep her still, and searched for a distraction, “Hey, did Lily decide on flowers in the end?”

“Anything except lillies or petunias,” Mary said, with a grateful smile, “Me and Marls are wearing lavender, so whatever goes with that.”

“Sounds nice.” Remus nodded, though he couldn’t for the life of him picture the colour lavender - was it purple? Or blue?

“I’m so glad you’re here with me, Remus,” Mary said, “I could only ever get my defensive spells right in your study groups.”

“We’re just here to watch. Everything will be alright.”

They waited for hours, and when Travers finally came out, staggering and reeking of spirits, he was not alone. Remus had to nudge Mary, who’d nodded off, lolling against his shoulder.

“Oh shit!” She whispered, her voice hoarse with terror, “Six of them, Remus!”

Remus held a finger to his lips, signalling her to be quiet. He watched the death eaters spill out of the pub onto the quiet country road. He recognised a few of them from pictures Moody had shown the order - Karkaroff, Dolohov, and Alecto Carrow. Two of them he recognised by scent.

“Fuck.” He said under his breath, “It’s Mulciber and Snape.”

“No!” Mary grabbed his arm, peering to look, “Oh my god! We’ve got to get out of here!”

The problem was, the car was just for show, and anyway neither of them could drive.

“Stay calm,” Remus said, “We’ll just wait for them to go - I bet they’re going to app--”

“Oooh, muggles!” Alecto Carrow, a stocky, horsey faced young woman pointed gleefully at the Cortina, “Let’s play!”

“Fuck.” Remus said again. The six dark robed wizards glided towards them, drawing their wands. Remus pulled his out too, Mary following suit. “Quick,” he said, “Let’s get out, maybe we can--”

“*APERIO* !” Travers whipped his wand at the car, and the doors ripped away, wrenched from their hinges with a horrible, crunching metal sound.

Mary screamed, but she kept her wand up. Remus pushed her backwards, shielding her with his body and hoping they could get out the other side. He’d feel much better with a car between them and the six dangerous killers.

“They’re not muggles!” One of the death eaters said, gleefully - was it Mulciber? “They’re mudbloods!”

“Ahh even better!” Alecto cackled.

“*Impedimenta* !” Remus yelled, as he and Mary got free of the car.

“*Loony Lupin* , is that you?!” Snape now, “What luck! *Sectumsc* --”

“*LANGLOCK* !” Mary cried, with so much emotion that Remus heard the *click* as Snape’s teeth

snapped shut, and he clutched his jaw with both hands, unable to speak.

“*Crucio* !” Mulciber shouted, aiming at Mary, but Remus jumped in quickly with a shield charm.

“Stupefy!” Mary got Mulciber, but the others were still advancing, even Snape, though he was still disabled.

“Quick, Mary!” Remus grabbed her hand, and they disappeared, landing just about on their feet in the middle of Cardiff town centre. Luckily it was so late there were no muggles about - except for a very drunk looking tramp, who rubbed his eyes at the sight of them.

“Where are we?” Mary asked, shakily, her eyes huge.

“Doesn’t matter,” Remus panted, “We need to do it again - six times to be safe, remember?”

“Right, yes, ok,” she nodded, clearly in shock. Remus realised he’d have to do it again. He squeezed her hand once more, and they were in Essex, only a mile or so from St Edmund’s. The landing was even harder this time, and Remus had to bend forward to stop his head spinning.

“Again.” He grunted.

“I’ll do it.” Mary took his hand, and dragged him whirling through space once more. Next they had arrived in an industrial estate somewhere, trucks and lorries parked outside big warehouses, glowing under faint yellow street lamps. “Ugh,” Mary pressed a hand to her forehead, wincing, “Ok, again.”

The fourth time, they had to cling to each other to stop from falling over. The fifth time, they landed on their backs - thankfully in a soft grassy field somewhere in the Lake District. Remus hauled himself up, his legs practically jelly, his head spinning. He pulled Mary up too, and she stumbled against him, woozy.

“I’m going to be sick.” She said, then promptly turned around and threw up. Remus rubbed her back gently, blinking sweat out of his eyes,

“You’re doing so well,” he choked, “Just once more...”

It was almost dawn when they got back to London, exhausted and queasy, heads throbbing. Mary stayed at their flat, saying she couldn’t go to her mum’s looking so rough. Sirius summoned Moody through the fireplace, and he arrived immediately, interrogating Remus and Mary who sat shaking on the couch, wrapped in blankets and sipping weak tea.

“Excellent work, you two,” He nodded to them before leaving, “Keep it up, and you’ll both make it through.”

Mary burst into tears.

* * *

It was bad all round. Remus and Mary’s narrow escape that night was not their last, nor were they the only ones to find themselves in a tight spot. Remus frequently had to leave the room while James and Sirius recounted their own misadventures, and Peter had developed a bit of a stammer whenever anyone mentioned death eaters.

All told, the wedding felt like the only bright spot in their rapidly shortening futures. They’d certainly had their fill of funerals.

So, in late August when Remus and Sirius had an unexpected visit from Lily, who was in a state of panic, they immediately assumed the worst.

“Oh, thank god you’re here!” She said, bursting into their living room. Her hair was up in a messy ponytail, and she looked over tired and overworked.

“What’s the matter?!” Remus stood up, quickly.

“Not you,” she brushed him aside dismissively, then turned to Sirius, “I need *you* !”

“What’s up?” Sirius looked just as puzzled as Remus. Lily *never* needed his help. “Is it Prongs?”

“Yes, the bastard.”

The worry left Sirius’s face and he smirked.

“Look, if this is about the stag do…”

“Oh, I don’t care what you lot get up to,” she tutted impatiently, “This is much, much more important.”

“I’ll put the kettle on, then…” Remus said, disappearing into the kitchen. He could still hear them through the wall.

“So, what is it then?” Sirius was asking.

“I can’t dance.”

“What?!” He scoffed, “I’ve seen you dance.”

“Yeah, I can shake my hips to pop music, but I’m talking about *proper dancing* . With steps, and James leading, and counting ‘one two three’, the whole shebang!”

Sirius was laughing, now.

“It’s going to be *that* sort of wedding? Prongs practically promised me there would be modern music!”

“There will be!” Lily returned, defensively, “But… well it’s traditional to have a first dance, and I think his mum would like to see it. I agreed to do it ages ago; I thought ‘fine, we’ll just stick on something soppy and just sort of cling on to each other for a few minutes’, but that *wanker* just casually mentioned the fact that he’s been ballroom dancing since he could walk!”

Sirius snorted,

“Yep, sounds about right. Look, Evans, you’re the one bonkers enough to marry a pureblood, you’ve made your bed now.”

“But you have to help me!”

“Ohhhh no…”

Remus re-entered the room with a tray balancing three mugs of tea.

“Go on,” he said, slyly, “I’d love to see this.”

“Absolutely not.” Sirius folded his arms decisively. “Get Pete to do it! He’s a pureblood too!”

“He’s too short,” Lily shook her head, “And... well I don’t want to be mean, but he’s very clumsy, and I don’t want him stepping on my feet while I’m breaking in my wedding shoes. They’re white satin. *Please*, Sirius? I’m a fast learner, I swear, you just need to get me through one dance.”

“Moony!” Sirius pleaded, as Remus sat beside him, “Save me!”

“I think you should do it,” Remus replied, sipping his tea, “For James.”

“Yes!” Lily nodded enthusiastically, “For James!”

“He doesn’t deserve me.” Sirius grumbled. “Fine. *One* lesson. A waltz is easy enough. Moony, go away.”

“Absolutely not.” Remus sat down on the couch, settling in for the show, “I’ve never seen you waltz before, and I’m not going to miss it.”

Sirius held up his middle finger, then tossed his head and turned to Lily.

“Right,” he said, haughtily, “Give me your hands...”

As amusing as it first seemed, fifteen minutes into the lesson Remus was completely entranced.

Sirius worked hard to hide his pure-bloodedness most of the time. Ever since they were kids, Remus had been aware of Sirius mimicking his accent, and sometimes even his mannerisms in an effort to seem less privileged. He slouched, he swore, he wore ripped jeans and leather jackets. But here was proof that Sirius Orion Black, heir to the most prestigious and ruthless magical house in Britain, had not completely forgotten his roots.

At the time, Remus found it charming - as he found almost everything about Sirius charming. He held his head high, showing off his long white neck and regal jawline. He took Lily in his arms like a real gentleman - like a courtly prince. When he moved, he glided; not a step out of place. He was the picture of incorruptible nobility. It drove Remus mad.

“Thank you so much!” Lily gushed, rather pink cheeked after two hours of dancing, “I have to get back, or he’ll wonder where I am, but I seriously owe you one, Black.”

“Oh, just your first born will do.” Sirius waved a hand gallantly, grinning. He looked like he’d enjoyed himself too.

Lily grabbed her bag, kissed them both on the cheek, and left via the fireplace. Sirius turned to Remus, who was still watching him from the couch. He pulled a face,

“Go on then, take the piss...”

“Never,” Remus smirked, getting up and walking over to him, “I love how fancy you are.”

He slung his arms over Sirius’s shoulders and leaned in for a kiss. It went on a long time; Sirius pressing against him, affectionately at first, but then with more eagerness as the kiss deepened. Since Remus had returned from the pack things had been a bit dry in that department - not that they’d been monks, exactly, but on the rare instances neither of them was exhausted, sex had become pretty functional.

Sirius grinned against Remus’s lips, tilting his head back. Remus’s hands were on Sirius’s waist,

and his thumbs found their way under the waistband of his jeans, stroking circles on his hip bones that made Sirius squirm.

Remus grinned too, pulling back,

“Wanna dance?”

* * *

So tell my baby, I said so long.

Tell my mother, I did no wrong -

Tell my brother to watch his own

And tell my friends to mourn me none

Three days after the dancing lesson, Sirius and Remus found themselves with a miraculously free Sunday. There were no missions; there were no meetings; there were no wedding-catastrophes to solve. And as far as Remus knew, neither of them were in mortal peril. So they spent it the best way they could think of - sleeping.

They had the longest lie in since Hogwarts had finished, and it must have been almost twelve by the time Sirius got up to let the post-owl in - it had been angrily pecking at their bedroom window for fifteen minutes.

The owl hooted indignantly, circled the room, then dropped the Daily Prophet on Remus's legs, while Sirius rifled around in the bedside table for a knut to give it. Remus rolled over, groaning. He considered covering his head with the duvet and just going back to sleep.

“Shall I do breakfast?” Sirius asked, picking up the paper. “Breakfast in bed?”

“Have I told you how much I love you?” Remus smiled, eyes squinting open. He stretched a bit, yawning, “I think we've run out of eggs though, so--”

“Remus!” Sirius grabbed his arm so hard he'd have bruises the next day. He shoved the paper in his face, and Remus - startled and half awake - blinked at the headline.

BLACK HEIR CONFIRMED DEAD

“Eh?” Remus scratched his head, confused, “That's mental, you're not--”

Then it hit him. Oh. He felt so stupid. He looked up at Sirius, who was white as a sheet, eyes wide and pained.

“Oh” Remus said, helplessly reaching out, “Oh no, Sirius...”

I'm chained upon the face of time

Feeling full of foolish rhyme

There ain't no dark till something shines

I'm bound to leave the dark behind

The War: Dulce et Decorum est

Chapter Summary

Grief is a big theme in this chapter, so read with care.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sirius didn't speak again. At first Remus tried to be understanding; he did everything he could think of. He got up, he made tea, and offered whisky, though Sirius shook his head at that.

He tried talking to him, but Sirius just stared at the article.

"Is there anything you need? I'll get you anything at all, just say...?"

Nothing. Sirius just blinked, and began re-reading from the top. There was a photograph of a tall terraced house in a posh part of London, but Remus couldn't see much else, and Sirius was clutching the newspaper so hard his knuckles turned white.

It was frightening. Remus stood beside him, reached out and touched his shoulder, which was as stiff as a statue's. Sirius barely reacted. Remus left the room.

He went to the front door, where their two jackets were hung, one soft and brown, one silver studded black leather. He reached into the pocket of the leather jacket and pulled out the silver compact mirror inside. He cracked it open,

"Prongs?! Prongs!"

James's face appeared, dark eyed and concerned,

"Moony?"

"It's Sirius - something's happ--"

"I know," James cut him off, "I just saw the paper. I'll be two minutes."

He vanished, and the mirror just flashed back Remus's own distressed face. Still; that was a relief. James would know just what to do.

Remus hated himself for thinking it, but one thing kept blaring in his mind like a foghorn; *was it werewolves? Was it Greyback?* He needed to read the article; he needed to find out as much as possible.

The fireplace suddenly blazed green, and James stepped through, casting around. He looked at Remus.

"Bedroom." Remus said. James nodded and went straight through without a word.

Remus closed his eyes, breathing deeply. He could make more tea. He really wanted a proper drink, but it was early in the day, and if Sirius didn't want any then it would look pretty bad if

Remus started on the gin. *Fuck*. Sirius had been *so good* when Hope died - how?! At the time Remus had taken it for granted, and now he couldn't think of a single useful thing to say or do.

Regulus was dead. Sirius's brother was dead.

Remus went back into the bedroom. James was sitting on the bed, an arm around Sirius, talking in his ear very low. Sirius looked as though he was only half listening as he stared into space. The paper had been dropped, finally, and lay on the floor, half under the bed.

"He made his choice a long time ago," James was saying, "You mustn't blame yourself, you mustn't let this--"

"It doesn't say what happened." Sirius said, finally speaking, his voice deeper than usual, "Does anyone know? Your dad, or Moody? Was there an attack last night, or--?"

James shook his head, arm still around Sirius,

"No, nothing that would suggest... but of course, we could have missed something. There's evidence that he - that Voldemort's been killing death eaters. To um. To keep them in line. Some of them are having doubts, you know."

Remus remembered the werewolves' sinister occupation. Perhaps Greyback hadn't been enough of a threat for some of the old families. Voldemort had to make an example. That made some sense. Apparently it did to Sirius, too. His eyes focussed, narrowing. He sniffed, though he hadn't shed one tear, and straightened his back, shrugging off James.

"Well then." He said brusquely, "Got what he deserved, didn't he."

James glanced back at Remus, and they shared a worried look.

"Mate," James said, "He was your brother, it's ok if--"

"No." Sirius stood up, sharply, forcing James to get up too, staggering back against the wardrobe, "He wasn't my brother. They're not my family. That was always made *very clear*."

"But you--"

"He was my enemy. He'd have killed every one of us without a second thought. So I'm glad he's gone. One less Death Eater. Good. Brilliant." He looked at James and Remus, as if challenging them. Neither of them dared. "I'm going to take a shower." He said, and left the room.

Remus gnawed his lip. James let out a heavy sigh.

"At least he's up, I s'pose. Ugh, *Regulus, you little shit*. It's like his final act was to mess with Sirius's head."

"I know what you mean." Remus said, trying to see the funny side. "It feels like any time things start getting back to normal another catastrophe hits."

"Moody would say 'that's war, lads'." James replied, just as humourlessly.

They were quiet for a bit, and heard the boiler in the bathroom grinding as Sirius turned on the hot water. James ran his fingers through his hair, "It'll be over for good, one day. I know it will, Moony. We've just got to do our best until then."

Remus nodded - and he did feel a bit better. James had that power; he could bring optimism to even

the darkest hour.

“How are your folks?” Remus asked, aware that James had left his sick parents very suddenly.

“They’re ok. Mum’s panicking about flower arrangements. Pete and his mum are visiting, and Lily’s there, so they’re not alone. I didn’t tell them about this... there wasn’t time, and I don’t want to put any more strain on them. They’d want to come over and check on him.”

“If he’s decided to be like this about it,” Remus said, “Then I think it’s best not to fuss too much.”

“You’re right.” James nodded, tiredly. He gave Remus a soft smile, “You were always right, when it came to him, eh?”

Remus shrugged, because he thought James was being awfully kind - usually Remus thought he was doing a terrible job taking care of Sirius.

“I tried to contact Moody,” James continued, back to business, “See if he knows anything - but he’s not answering. To be honest -” James lowered his voice, leaning in to confide in Remus, “I don’t think Regulus was particularly high priority for anyone. It’s only because he’s a Black that he ended up in the paper at all.”

“You think it was Voldemort, though? Who killed him?”

“Seems likely. He’s getting desperate, dad reckons. No one thought the war would go on this long - it’s not just our side that’s flagging.”

They went through to the living room, and Remus made more tea. They were almost out of PG tips, and he scribbled down a note to pin to their cork noticeboard which hung beside the fridge. Once they’d sat down, Remus finally read the article in the paper.

BLACK HEIR CONFIRMED DEAD

Regulus Arcturus Black II, only child of Orion and Walpurga Black, has today been confirmed dead in a statement issued from the Black family home in Islington. Born in 1961, the heir to the Black house and fortune was eighteen years old. He had recently completed his education at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry, where he distinguished himself as an impeccable student and gifted quidditch player.

Regulus is survived by his parents and his cousins who will attend a private memorial service later in the week. The family have requested privacy.

That was all. There wasn’t much else to say about such a short life, Remus supposed, and what had been said was largely untrue, or at the very least a smudged version of the truth. There was no mention at all of how he had died - but Remus thought that was probably a good thing; at least it definitely wasn’t Greyback. The Daily Prophet wouldn’t miss a chance to slip in a bit of werewolf bashing.

Sirius came into the living room, hair dripping, towel around his waist.

“I think I’ll work on the bike, today.” He said to the room, not really looking at either James or Remus, “Go home, Potter, I’m fine.” And left again, presumably to get dressed.

James and Remus looked at each other again.

“Will you be ok?” James asked, “If I go?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“Ok.” James hoisted himself up out of the armchair and went to the fireplace. “You have the mirror, if you need me. I’ll pop back this evening.”

“We’ll be fine.” Remus said, getting up to say goodbye. “He just needs a bit of space.”

“Don’t give it to him.” James said, suddenly, looking Remus in the eye, “Moony, I need you to keep an eye on him, ok? Don’t let him go anywhere. Don’t let him... don’t let him try to get in touch with anyone he’s related to. Except Andromeda, I s’pose.”

Remus nodded. That wouldn’t be too hard - Sirius never spoke to his relations.

“No problem.”

“I mean it. He might do something stupid, and we can’t risk it. Plenty of people still think Sirius is... you know, untrustworthy, because of his name, and something like this is going to...” James pinked the bridge of his nose, as if he was getting a headache. “Bloody Regulus.” He muttered again.

“I’ll look after him.” Remus said, firmly. “Don’t worry.”

“Thanks, Moony,” James gripped his arm, and it was as if they were thirteen again; juggling responsibility for their wayward best friend.

James left, and Sirius reappeared at once, as if he had been waiting.

“Were you talking about me?”

“Of course we were,” Remus jutted out his chin, “We’re worried about you.”

“What did Prongs say?”

“That I’m not to let you out of my sight.”

Sirius snorted, “You’ll have to come to the garage, then.”

“Fine,” Remus smiled, breezily, “Lead the way.” He was determined to do as James had instructed - if only because he had no idea how else to be useful.

Remus had only ever been to their shared garage once. There were a few things stored there - mainly Sirius’s quidditch kit and various childhood things which wouldn’t fit in the flat. And the bike, of course. It was a Triumph Bonneville T120, the same as the one Sirius had first fallen in love with years ago at the Potters’. He’d painted a lion on the tank, and done some kind of enlarging spell on the body.

Sirius pulled out a rag and polished it, though it was already glistening. Remus stood quietly by, watching. Sirius prodded it with his wand in a few places, oiled it in others.

“When do you think it’ll be finished?” Remus asked, finally. “Ready to ride?”

“Last week,” Sirius replied, not looking up.

“You what?”

“It’s done. Engine runs, flying function works. I’m finished. I think so, anyway, haven’t taken it out yet.”

“Why not?”

Sirius just shrugged, and resumed his polishing. Remus watched him a bit longer. Obviously Sirius didn’t feel like talking, and that was fair enough - Remus understood that better than most people. But he also understood the need to do *something* when you couldn’t express yourself properly.

“Let’s go, then.” He said. Sirius, crouching in front of the bike rocked back on his heels and looked at Remus.

“Go? Go where?”

“Anywhere you like,” Remus shrugged, “Let’s take it for a spin.”

Sirius blinked,

“Really? You’ll come with me?”

“Well I’m hardly going to let you fly off on that deathtrap alone, am I?” Remus laughed, “What sort of boyfriend would I be if I didn’t follow you into the jaws of certain doom?”

The ghost of a smile flickered on Sirius’s face, and he stood up.

“Ok, then,” he nodded, “Let’s do it.”

Remus had never liked flying. He was competent on a broom these days, but it would never be his chosen form of transportation. He just didn’t like heights very much.

Still, he would do almost anything for Sirius, so he clambered onto the back seat and wrapped his arms around Sirius’s waist and took lots of very deep breaths. Sirius actually laughed at him, which was progress,

“Moony, are you sure you want to do this? I can feel your heart pounding!”

“Absolutely.” Remus nodded, squeezing his eyes shut as Sirius gripped the handlebars, “I’m sure I’ve faced worse than your driving.”

“Well, if you’re sure...” Sirius revved the engine and Remus clung on even tighter as the seat began to rumble.

They went slowly at first, Sirius navigated carefully out of the garage, pointing his wand at the door so that it closed and locked behind them, then trundled slowly along the quiet back street. Then he flicked a switch, and pressed down his foot, and they sped away, Remus still trying not to look, his stomach doing backflips.

“Here we go!” Sirius called out, and Remus buried his head in Sirius’s shoulder as they lifted off the ground, engine roaring as they gained height. Remus felt himself sliding backwards and yelped as his tailbone hit the metal back of his seat.

“Christ...” he whimpered. He really was going to die. Sirius laughed again,

“We did it, Moony!” He cried, “Open your eyes you big wuss!”

Remus did, and instantly regretted it. They were a few hundred feet above the London skyline already; he could see the broad concrete rooftops and beige streets below. The people looked like tadpoles and the cars like beetles and it was *such* a long way down.

“Oh my god...” he moaned.

Sirius cheered happily

“Isn’t it amazing!?” - he was facing forward, eyes on the horizon. It was blue skies as far as the eye could see. The wind rushed past their ears, cold and fresh, and Remus had to squint against the sun.

“...azing,” he shouted back, feeling quite sick, but pleased that Sirius was happy.

They zoomed all over London for the better part of an hour - going as low as Sirius dared along the winding Thames, taking sharp corners around skyscrapers and almost crashing right into the dome of St Paul’s. Finally, the engine began to slow, and Remus noticed they were losing height. He looked down, bravely and squinted at the unfamiliar streets below,

“Where are we?”

“Islington.”

“What?! Sirius!”

Shit! He was supposed to be keeping him *away* from the Blacks, and now they were heading right for them!

“Calm down,” Sirius replied, as they sank even further. They appeared to be aiming for a huge stretch of green space - a public park with trees and a lake and neat gravel paths around brightly coloured flower beds.

The landing was less than perfect. They hit the grass so hard they drove great muddy tracks in it, and Remus was finally thrown from the saddle altogether (though he was so relieved to be back on solid ground he could have kissed the grass).

“Bugger,” Sirius said, cutting the engine and leaping off gracefully, “I’ll get better at that bit - you ok?” He held out a hand to help Remus up.

“Fine, I think,” Remus brushed his trousers and arms. “Where are we?”

“Highbury Fields.” Sirius cast *obfuscate* on the bike and then did his best to mend the ruined lawn. “I used to come here a lot before I left home.”

“Oh, right,” Remus said, softly, “With Reg?”

“Sometimes,” Sirius sniffed, “Our governess brought us.”

Remus decided to store away this new revelation that Sirius had had a *governess* for another time.

“It’s nice,” he said, looking around at the lush green parkland, “Pretty. Want to show me around?”

Sirius smiled at him gratefully, and they went for a quiet Sunday afternoon walk. Here and there Sirius would stop and point something out - a tree he had climbed once, or a bridge he’d hidden under. Remus enjoyed listening. He had rarely heard any happy childhood memories from Sirius, and for a little while he even forgot why they were there.

They stopped by the war memorial. It was particularly fancy - Remus supposed because there was a fair bit of money in Islington. Atop the white plinth stood the green hued statue of a young woman in ancient robes, holding aloft a laurel crown. An allegory for victory.

“I did my first magic here.” Sirius said with a grin, “When I was four.”

“Really? What did you do?”

“Set fire to her head,” he nodded at the statue. “Always been a rebel.”

“Amazing,” Remus laughed.

“Yeah, Douceline - our governess - went mad trying to put it out. But we kept laughing, me and Reggie, and every time she extinguished it I just did it again, because it made him so happy.”

Sirius looked down. He was quiet for a while, and Remus just put a hand on his shoulder, to show that he didn’t have to speak, if he didn’t want to.

They looked at the plaque on the memorial. *How sleep the brave who sink to rest, By all their country’s wishes bless’d.* Remus couldn’t help but wonder about the names of the men listed below. How old had they been? Robert Fenn, Peter Cross, Arthur Hill... Had they all thought they were doing the right thing? Had they all been brave in their last moments? Had they thought of their family, their brothers?

And when this war was over, would there be a plaque just like this in Diagon Alley? Whose names would it bear? Not Regulus’s.

“Come on.” Sirius said, finally. “I’m ready to go home, now.”

Chapter End Notes

The chapter title is from the Wilfred Owen poem of the same name, which itself is taken from Horace.

The War: Autumn 1979

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Well I take whatever I want

And baby I want you

You give me something I need

Now tell me I got something for you

Come on come on come on and do it

Come on and do what you do

I can't get enough of your love

I can't get enough of your love

I can't get enough of your love

Friday 7th September 1979

“Uuurgh, bugger!” Remus groaned, cradling his shoulder and biting his lip.

Padfoot came bounding over, yapped, then transformed back into Sirius,

“What’s up?”

“Dislocated.” Remus grimaced, still clutching his arm. “Have you got my wand?”

“Yeah, hang on...”

“All right, Moony?” James and Peter came sauntering out of the thicket. “That was great!”

“Yeah, great...” Remus accepted his wand from Sirius and pointed it at his sore arm. He thought about Livia and Castor, as he did every full moon since meeting the pack. He hoped they were both safe, and he sort of wished he had them nearby, just for the healing benefits.

Arm fixed - or as close as he could get it, he struggled to his feet and pulled on his clothes, stashed under a nearby bush.

“Ok?” Sirius asked, watching him warily, “You look a bit shaky.”

“Just hurts a bit,” Remus said, having to stop himself from shrugging, “Can I side-along with you to get back?”

“Of course. Oi, Prongs,” Sirius nudged James with his elbow, grinning, “Bloody good stag do, eh? Eh?? Stag do?!”

“Yes, Padfoot, very funny,” James snorted, “Just as funny as the last hundred times.”

“I’m wasted on you lot,” Sirius sighed.

“Less than twenty-four hours to go!” Peter said, “How are you feeling?”

“Tired.” James said, with a yawn. “Shall we?”

They apparated back to the Potters’, which was already a hive of activity. They’d hired four extra house elves in preparation for the wedding the next day, and the tiny little creatures darted back and forth across the kitchen whipping up a feast.

Lily and Mrs Potter were sitting at the kitchen table - Mrs Potter in her dressing gown and slippers, which she was never out of these days. Lily jumped up to kiss James,

“Morning darling - I just stayed long enough to see you, but I’ll be off now. How are you, Remus?”

Remus nodded, blank and exhausted.

Lily cocked her head and tutted, “Go to bed, the lot of you, you all need your beauty sleep. James, I’ve left you a list of things you need to get sorted this afternoon - give me a ring when it’s all finished or I’ll never sleep. Sirius, did he give you the rings? Oh no, silly me, I’ve got them, here you go... Remus, will you make sure he doesn't lose them? Pete, your mum popped round and I said you’d gone out with the lads and were sleeping off a hangover, so better if you don’t go home. I’m sending Mary over this evening with the buttonholes for you all, and the ties if Madam Malkin hurries up and gets them finished... oooh, do you all have shoes?!”

“Merlin, Evans,” Sirius yawned, “Anyone would think you’re getting married tomorrow.”

She stuck her tongue out at him, kissed James, hugged Remus and hurried out the door.

“Go to bed, boys!” She shouted, as she left. “See you at the top of the aisle, Potter!”

Remus looked down at the list Lily had left James - it was at least fifteen inches of parchment, and Lily had small handwriting. James ignored it,

“Alright, mum?” He said, going over to Mrs Potter. She had two dark smudges under her eyes, and her hair was pale and stringy. Remus was finding it hard to meet her eye, these days - she reminded him so much of his last visit with Hope.

“Fine, fine,” She beamed up at him, “There’s so much to do!”

“Leave it for now,” he said, an arm around her, “Let’s all go to bed...”

“That Lily,” Mrs Potter said as they all made slow progress up the stairs, “She’s a force to be reckoned with.”

“Too right.” The boys all agreed.

Remus collapsed into bed without even taking his clothes off, and could have fallen asleep right there.

“Moony,” Sirius yawned again, pulling his boots off, “Don’t conk out until you’ve had your potion, McKinnon’s orders.”

“Mmmph.” Remus groaned, rolling over and reaching for the bottle on the bedside table. Sirius

clambered in beside him as he finished it.

“Whose idea was it to have a wedding right after a full moon?!” He complained, another yawn encroaching.

“I told you all to just leave me to it,” Remus replied, closing his eyes and flinging an arm over his face.

“And miss the chance to make ‘stag do’ puns for the rest of the week? No chance.”

Remus chuckled and quickly fell asleep.

* * *

Having never attended a wedding in his life, Remus was very grateful to Lily for having left a list. It meant he always knew what to do. However, he quickly learnt that very little about weddings made any sense at all. For example, once they’d all woken up around midday, their first task was to decorate the quidditch hoops in the back garden.

“Why are we doing this?” Remus asked, frowning up at the goals, as Peter arrived levitating a crate of white flowers.

“So they look nice,” James replied, broom in hand. “It’s the only way Lily would get married under them.”

Remus stared at him,

“You’re getting married under your old quidditch hoops?!”

“I know!” He grinned, “Brilliant, isn’t?!”

“Err...”

“Moony,” Sirius said quickly, “You and Pete work on the growing charm down here, Prongs and I will fly up and do the hoops.”

Once they were finished, the three goal posts looked like a bizarre spindly rose bush had tried to take over. Next they had to decorate the nearby trees with the same flowers, and summon all of the chairs from the Potters’ extensive attic, then get them to line up neatly in rows of eight. After that, Mrs Potter asked Peter and Sirius to help her with all of the crockery for the reception, and gave James and Sirius instructions to ‘sort out the ballroom’.

“Ballroom?!” Remus looked at James, confused. He’d been visiting the Potters’ for years now, and felt he knew the house pretty well - but he’d never seen a ballroom.

“Yeah, we don’t use it much,” James replied casually, “Keep it in storage.”

“In... storage?” How on earth you ‘stored’ an entire room, Remus did not know.

“Yup, I just need to remember where the instructions are...”

They went into James’s dad’s study, and James located a map inside one of the desk drawers. Remus got quite interested then - he would always be very fond of maps. This one was a blueprint for the Potters’ mansion, which made it extra fascinating. There were all kinds of special little spells and enchantments labelled on it, but they had work to do, so he couldn’t get a good look.

The ballroom was hidden behind the living room couch. James and Remus both had to concentrate very hard and murmur some ancient incantations to get the doors to appear. Then, of course, the couch had to be moved and the door unlocked, which was annoyingly fiddly.

When James finally pushed the oak panelled double-doors open, Remus's jaw dropped. It was one of the most beautiful rooms he had ever seen; art deco marble pillars as far as the eye could see, and a glorious stained glass ceiling which cast jewel coloured patches of sunlight onto the dark hardwood floor.

"Bloody hell." He swallowed, feeling very small. He remembered watching Sirius and Lily rehearsing dance steps in their tiny living room, and for the first time in a long time Remus felt very poor and grubby next to his wealthy pureblood friends.

"I know," James laughed, "Stupid, isn't it? But y'know, at least we'll fit everyone in. I think we've got thirty-three Weasleys coming already."

Feeling a bit better, Remus set about helping James check the room, and then they conjured some mops to begin cleaning the floor. James closed the doors while they did this, so that they would not be disturbed,

"I know we're not *really* doing anything," he said guiltily, leaning against a marble column, "But I just want five minutes without someone giving me an order. I wouldn't mind, but Moody's only giving us two days off for the wedding - we're expected to report for duty on Sunday."

"Christ," Remus shook his head, tutting. They stood quietly for a bit, watching the mops glide back and forth like funny skinny ballroom dancers. Remus was grateful for a breather, too. The weekend had begun with a full moon, and was only going to get more hectic as it went on.

"How's Sirius?" James asked, out of the blue.

"Eh? Fine. Why?" Remus frowned.

"Just checking."

"You see him almost as much as I do." Remus teased him. It was true - James was much keener on the flying motorbike than Remus was, and they went for rides together almost every evening.

"I know," James nodded, "But he hasn't said anything about Regulus since... well, since he died."

"No." Remus sighed, "No, he hasn't."

It wasn't as if Remus had been pushing Sirius to talk about it, either - but he didn't think James would understand their policy of never discussing family stuff.

"I don't like him bottling it up," James said, "I know he had a complicated relationship with Reg, but it can't be normal to just pretend like he never existed."

"Who's to say what's normal?" Remus countered, "Everyone grieves differently."

"So he *is* grieving?" James was giving Remus a very intense look, and it made him uncomfortable. He didn't like other people asking him about Sirius's personal stuff - that was between them.

"Yeah, of course." He lied. That seemed to work.

"Good. I've been worried about him, it's been a shit year all round, eh?"

“Could say that,” Remus snorted. “It’s about to get a lot better though. Any pre-game nerves?”

“Nah,” James grinned, the worry leaving his face, “Feel like I’ve already won the cup.”

“Oh my *god* Prongs, you soppy git. That’s what you get for going out with girls.”

James roared with laughter, and by the time he had regained his composure the mops had finished their task, and the floor was gleaming as if brand new.

* * *

Saturday 8th September 1979

The first wedding Remus ever attended was the most beautiful and the happiest - and there was no way you could convince him otherwise. Everything went off without a hitch (well, he did have to talk an overexcited Sirius out of transforming into Padfoot to deliver the rings, but luckily it was only a fleeting mania), and it was smiles all round.

James’s parents looked as though they would burst with pride, both appearing healthier than Remus had seen them in ages, decked out in red and gold dress robes - Gryffindor colours. Marlene and Mary made beautiful bridesmaids in simple pale mauve dresses with circlets of gypsophila in their hair, and of course Lily herself was a vision in white lace.

It seemed to Remus that the day flew by in a pastel hued blur. He was always supposed to be somewhere, or doing something; there was barely a moment to relax and take stock. He was very glad that he’d never be getting married, because just being a groomsman was exhausting enough.

Once the ceremony was over and they had to start mingling, Remus found himself feeling very shy. He hadn’t been around so many wizards and witches since Hogwarts - the magic in the air was palpable; muggy. It bothered him less, now. His time with Greyback’s pack had taught him to cope with it, and as long as he didn’t need to do magic he was fine.

There were plenty of people he knew, of course. He spotted the Weasley’s without too much bother; Arthur and Molly were running around all over the place after their five rambunctious redheaded sons; the eldest two had decided they wanted to play quidditch with the decorated hoops now that the boring bit of the day was over.

Then of course Moody and Hagrid and Dumbledore, and lots of other people from the Order. It was nice to see them all at a happy event, for once; it made everyone look younger. Frank and Alice were just back from their honeymoon - which Alice confided to Remus had actually involved quite a lot of work; they’d gone to Slovenia on a knowledge transfer mission with the local Aurors.

And of course Ferox was there. He came over to shake Remus’s hand manfully,

“Looking very smart, Lupin,” he nodded, and Remus felt himself blush head to toe - though he knew Sirius looked a million times better in exactly the same robes. “And Ms. McDonald,” Ferox kissed her hand, which made her blush too, “Very beautiful indeed. Will it be wedding bells for you two, next?”

Remus blinked - he hadn’t come out to very many people, fair enough, but he sort of thought most people had cottoned on by now.

Mary laughed,

“As if Remus would marry me! I’d drive him up the wall!”

“Ah well,” Ferox clapped him on the shoulder, “You’re still young. Lots of wild oats to sow.”

“I live with Sirius,” Remus said, raising his eyebrows a little bit to see if his old teacher took the hint. But apparently not. Why were grownups always so dense?

“Free wheeling bachelors, eh?” Ferox laughed, gruffly.

Mary looked as though she was about to say something, but Remus caught her eye and gave the tiniest shake of his head. Not worth it.

“That’s right,” he nodded enthusiastically at Ferox.

After dinner (the best part of the day, in Remus’s opinion) Lily and James cut the cake - a huge towering affair with thirteen tiers covered in buttercream icing and pink piped roses - and then the dancing began.

Lily did Sirius proud - Remus could hear him counting under his breath as he watched them; “One two three, one two three... straighten that back, Evans! Good girl...”

The waltz over and done with, someone cast an amplifying charm on the Potters’ old turntable, and a Bad Company song began playing, which got all of the young people up and dancing - including Sirius, who Remus was grateful to hand over to Andromeda. Remus Lupin did not dance.

He was happy enough to sit by with a glass of champagne just watching, as usual. He look for Peter, who liked to dance but often lost steam after a few songs, but couldn’t see him anywhere. He’d probably found some friends from work and gone to chat with them. Yaz and Marlene were on the dancefloor - they were both pretty dreadful, Marene wasn’t used to heels - but it was very sweet all the same. Yaz had cut her hair since leaving Hogwarts in June, and the cropped pixie look really suited her.

Mary came to Remus’s rescue, in the end, as always. She hobbled over with a pained expression on her face and plonked down beside him.

“Blimey, these french knickers she’s got us in go right up your bum.”

“Charming as ever, MacDonald,” Remus smirked.

James and Lily whirled past them, smiling at each other like maniacs.

“Look at them,” Mary sighed. “Why can’t I find a bloke who loves me that much, eh? Not like I haven’t been looking.”

“You’ll find him,” Remus replied, just as happy.

“I’ll know it when I see it, that’s what my mum says.”

“If you’re lucky,” Remus snorted. He was a bit drunker than he’d initially thought, and his tongue was loose. But it was only Mary. “They say ‘love is blind’ for a reason.”

“I never had trouble recognising it, to be honest.” Mary confided. “It’s letting it in, that’s the hard part.”

Remus nodded in agreement, though he wasn’t sure he followed. She continued, sipping her champagne. “Like you did, with Sirius.”

“Oh yeah, my freewheeling bachelor friend.” Remus poked his tongue out, making Mary crease up,

giggling. Remus grinned, happy to make her happy. He squeezed her knee, “You’re going to fall in love one day, how could you not? Anyone would be lucky to have you.”

“Maybe once the war is over.” She said, lowering her voice, still watching the dancing. “I’m not sure I could survive falling in love right now, not with everything else on top.”

“Mm.” Remus looked away.

“Hiya,” Marlene appeared, drink in hand, “Remus, your boyfriend stole my partner.” She nodded across the dancefloor at Sirius and Yaz, who were swinging each other around wildly, apparently unable to decide who should lead.

Remus laughed, and Mary frowned, shifting uncomfortably in her seat. Marlene gave her a sympathetic look,

“French knickers?”

Mary nodded, wearily. Marlene leaned in and whispered, “I took mine off in the loos after the ceremony.”

“Oh my god McKinnon, you genius.” Mary sat up abruptly and strode across the room towards the doors. Marlene laughed, taking her seat.

One of the Weasley kids came skidding past, sliding on his knees across the highly polished ballroom floor. Molly came chasing after him, panting,

“WILLIAM ARTHUR WEASLEY YOU WILL *RUIN* THOSE TROUSERS!”

Marlene giggled, covering her mouth with her hand politely. She leaned in and whispered to Remus,

“I heard her tell Hattie Bones that she’s pregnant *again* - and she only just had twins last year!”

“Crikey.” Remus said, developing a whole new respect for quiet and reserved Arthur Weasley.

“I reckon those two are having kids as soon as possible.” Marlene nodded at James and Lily, “Be very surprised if we don’t get an announcement before Christmas.”

“Eurgh, really?” Remus wrinkled his nose. Weddings were one thing - they only lasted a day. But *babies* ?! They had to do babies, now?!

“Don’t be such a grumpy sod.” Marlene gave him a sharp elbow, “Change is part of life. Come on, treat me to a dance. Be nice to have a partner that’s taller than me.” She stood up and tugged on his wrist.

“Oh...” Remus sighed. “Ok, but only because they haven’t served the cake yet.”

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'Can't Get Enough' by Bad Company.

The War: Winter 1979

Chapter Summary

Finishing off 1979 with a few wintry evenings. This chapter (and likely the new few chapters) is really more a series of episodes to give a shape of Remus's life from 1979 onwards.

Warnings:

- Homophobia/threat of homophobic abuse
- Drinking - there's been a lot of drinking in the fic so far, but in this chapter particularly Remus begins showing signs of alcohol dependency/alcoholism. This is deliberate, and part of his characterisation - from 1980 onwards it will only get worse, so just a heads up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I wanna be straight! I wanna be straight!

I'm sick and tired of taking drugs and staying up late.

I wanna confirm. I wanna conform.

I wanna be snug and I wanna be safe and I wanna be warm.

I wanna be straight! I wanna be straight,

I wanna create a place of my own in the welfare state.

I'm gonna be good; I'm gonna be kind.

It might be a wrench but think of the stench I'm leaving behind...

I wanna be straight! I wanna be straight,

Come out of the cold and do what I'm told and don't deviate.

I wanna give, I wanna give, I wanna give my consent -

I'm learning to hate all the things that were great when I used to be... bent!

Friday 23rd November 1979

After all of the excitement of autumn, the beginning of winter felt remarkably unremarkable. Remus tried to be grateful for it; for once in his life things were quiet. He didn't get kidnapped by werewolves; there were no parents' funerals or brothers dying.

He tried to make himself useful to the order. Sometimes they wanted things researched - help

identifying curses that the death eaters were using, or coming up with new spells that could be used against them. He occasionally worked with Alice on this, and got to know her fairly well. She was incredibly intelligent, one of the most skilled duellists Remus had ever met. He got very good at defensive charms, and spent a lot of time visiting various safehouses, setting up barriers and early warning systems.

Remus worked hard. He threw himself into it. He had a very strong desire to be involved, to strive for something good. Maybe he was growing up. Maybe he was just sick of having no control over his own life.

Marlene came over a few evenings a week after work. She and Remus would sit up at the kitchen table, and he would tell her as much as he could about being a werewolf - his sense of smell, his increased metabolism, and how he cared for himself during and after a full moon. He tried to be as honest as he could without getting anyone else in trouble, and she diligently took notes, asked questions and suggested improvements.

It was difficult for Remus, but also necessary. Marlene's earnest nature and fierce determination to improve living standards for werewolves made him feel a bit better - like he might be doing some good after all.

"We need to get the ministry away from this idea that cells and bars are the only remedy," she would say, "From what you've told me, woodland is far better for the health of the subject - and we're hardly short of woodland, are we? A few protective barrier spells would do it... all we need is some creative thinking, some *compassion* ..."

Remus smiled at her. Marlene made him feel like there really would be change one day. And it was nice to spend time with a friend - Sirius was so often out in the evenings on missions or at meetings.

"How are you finding it, living with Sirius?" Marlene asked one evening as she was packing up. She looked around at the dark empty flat, "Quieter than my house."

Marlene was still living with her mother and step-dad, and Danny ever since he'd been bitten. More recently, Yaz had moved in too. Remus didn't know all the details, but it sounded as though Yaz's parents hadn't been thrilled when they found out about Marlene.

"It's fine," Remus nodded, helping her collect together her notes. "Different from school, obviously."

"Bet it's nice having your own space."

"It can be."

"Do you... do you two fight much? You know, with all the stress and the missions..." Marlene was chewing her lip now, fiddling with a strand of loose hair.

"No." Remus said, reflexively; shutting down, as he always did when it came to his private life with Sirius.

"Oh," Marlene sighed, lowering her eyes. "Maybe it's just us then. Maybe because my family's around all the time."

Remus felt a rush of sympathy for her. He touched her arm, "I bet it's normal, with all the stuff everyone's been through lately. Emotions running high and all that."

“Maybe.” Marlene still sounded forlorn.

“Look,” Remus said, lowering his voice even though they were alone, “The only reason Sirius and I *don't* argue is that we’re barely ever in the same room lately. And when we *are* in the same room we do everything we can to avoid talking about the war, even though it's all either of us can think about.”

He felt a rush of adrenaline having said this - he rarely spoke so openly about his feelings with anyone but Sirius.

Marlene blinked at him tearfully,

“Really? You don’t talk about it?”

“Not since Regulus died.”

“Oh, of course,” she nodded, softly, then wiped her eyes with her wrists, “Sometimes I feel like it’s *all* me and Yaz talk about; it’s exhausting. God, I can’t take all this death - all this *misery*. Do you know what Mary said to me the other day? She’s thinking of bowing out, giving up.”

“On the war?!” Remus stared, alarmed.

“No,” Marlene shook her head, “*Everything* - the wizarding world. She said she’d rather just take her chances as a muggle with no education. Of course I know she didn’t mean it, but I understand where she’s coming from. We’ve been fighting and fighting, doing everything we can and it’s just not enough, is it? They’re winning.”

“You can’t think like that.” Remus said. He really didn’t want to hear this - it was awful to listen to someone he admired being so pessimistic. She was saying exactly the things that kept him up at night.

“I know, I know, we’ve got to keep trying, no matter what.” Marlene said, still crying quietly, “But it’s taking everything I have, Remus. All I do - all *any* of us do is work and fight. What if... what if the war ends, and there’s nothing left of me? What if I can’t remember how to be happy?”

“That’s bollocks,” Remus shook his head vehemently, “Of course you know how to be happy!”

He went over to give her a hug. Marlene was almost as tall as he was, and her fair hair tickled his cheek.

“I’m being silly,” she sniffed, over his shoulder, “Just over-tired. The nights are drawing in, it makes me gloomy.”

“I don’t think you’re being silly,” Remus said as they pulled apart, “And you know you have so many friends to talk to when you feel gloomy.”

“I know,” she smiled, cheeks blotchy. “Thanks, Remus.”

“Cup of tea?”

“No, I ought to get home - Yaz is stuck listening to stories of Danny’s glory days with the Cannons, otherwise.”

“Ha, go and rescue her then,” Remus grinned. He wanted to ask how Danny was - but he didn’t dare. They hadn’t spoken properly in a year - another thing that would have to wait until the end of

the war.

Marlene said goodbye and left through the fireplace in a blaze of green flames. Remus tidied up a bit, then went to wash the ink off his hands. It had got under his fingernails and turned them black, which made him think about Livia again. He'd become extremely enthusiastic about hygiene ever since he came back from the werewolves.

He looked out of the living room window, which was fogged up with the early winter chill. Street lamps were flickering on, glowing yellow in the blue twilight - except the one outside their window, which was faulty and stayed pinkish-red all night. With Marlene gone, Remus was gripped with a terrible aching loneliness. He fetched his scarf and jacket and headed out the door.

The garage door was open as he approached from the dark alleyway, light pouring out onto the uneven cracked pavement. As he got closer, he could hear the radio playing softly - a Stranglers song; *"And it sounds like an empty house, standing still..."*

Sirius was singing along, under his breath, like he was concentrating hard. When Remus was finally at the threshold he found Sirius cross-legged on the floor in front of his bike, wand behind one ear, spanner in hand. The garage was conspicuously warm, for winter, but Remus couldn't see where he'd cast the heat charm. Perhaps on the floor itself.

"Hello," he said. Sirius looked up, surprised.

"Hello, what are you doing here?"

"Marlene left," Remus shrugged, "Thought I'd just pop down and see what you're up to."

"Same old. Just tinkering." Sirius said.

"Oh, ok."

"...sit down for a bit, if you like. I'm nearly finished." Sirius gestured to a stool in the corner of the garage.

"Only if I'm not in your way."

"Don't be silly," Sirius flashed him a smile, and Remus sat.

He watched Sirius working for a while, fascinated. Remus knew nothing about mechanics - muggle or magic - and it made him feel weirdly proud that Sirius was clearly so skilled. He liked that feeling.

"How are you?" He asked, thinking of the conversation with Marlene.

"Eh? Fine." Sirius didn't look up, wand between his teeth now as he fiddled with the engine.

"No, I mean really." Remus pushed, "Are you ok? Just in general? Don't feel like I've asked much lately."

Sirius looked at him, and set down his wand.

"I'm fine, Remus," he said, "Don't worry."

"But I love worrying," Remus poked his tongue out.

Sirius grunted with laughter and returned to his work, "How are you?" He asked.

“Good.” Remus nodded, before re-thinking, “Well, you know. As good as it’s possible to be, right now.”

“Mm. Do you fancy a takeaway for dinner? I don’t want to cook.”

“Yeah, ok.” Remus agreed. He waited quietly. There was a stack of boxes to his left. All of Sirius’s things were packed into big mahogany trunks with scorch marks where he’d burnt the Black family crest off. But the boxes next to Remus were cardboard and held together with brown muggle tape.

“What are these?” He asked, picking at the tape. Sirius looked up, wiping his hands on an old dishcloth,

“Oh... those are the boxes from Gethin.”

“What?” Remus stood up to get a better look. Sirius bit his lip, looking nervous.

“I know you said to get rid of the stuff your mum left you, but... well you weren’t in any state to talk about it after the funeral, and I couldn’t bear the thought of you regretting it. So James and I went to collect them, and I’ve just had it all here.”

“I can’t believe you,” Remus said, stunned. Sirius climbed to his feet hurriedly,

“Moony, I’m sorry, it wasn’t meant to be a secret or anything, I swear! It’s just that after your mum passed away it was one disaster after the other, so it sort of slipped my mind... and you can still get rid of them, if you want to, I haven’t looked!”

“Sirius,” Remus shook his head, smiling, “I mean *I can’t believe* you. You’re amazing. Thank you.”

“Oh.” Sirius smiled too, scratching behind his ear bashfully, “That’s good. Because you had so little time with her, I thought you’d want something to remember her by. Do you want to look now?”

Remus thought about it. Shook his head.

“Not just yet. Maybe on a rainy day.”

He helped Sirius collect everything up, and they walked back to the flat, stopping at the pie shop on the way. Sirius liked chicken and mushroom, Remus preferred steak and onion. He carried the paper bag, to be gallant.

“Seriously,” He said, as they climbed the stairs to the flat, “Thank you so much for the boxes. I’d have forgotten all about them.”

“S’ok,” Sirius shrugged, “I know if I had anything of Reg’s...” he stopped abruptly.

Remus didn’t know what to say, so he kept quiet as Sirius unlocked the door and entered the flat, switching the lights on and complaining, “Bloody hell, Moony, it’s freezing in here!”

“Sorry!” He tended to run hot, even in winter, and didn’t turn the heating on if he was the only one in the flat. He felt very stupid now, remembering that Marlene had kept her gloves on the whole time she’d been there and it hadn’t even occurred to him to ask why.

Sirius lit a fire, and Remus went to get plates for their dinner. They sat on the couch, leaning shoulder to shoulder and listening to the new album by The Police, which Andromeda had sent for

Sirius's birthday.

When they'd finished eating, Sirius rested his head on Remus's shoulder and closed his eyes, settling in. Remus sent the plates to the kitchen and raised his arm for Sirius to fit under. Warm, well fed and relaxed, he could have fallen asleep just like that.

"How's Marls?" Sirius murmured after a little while.

"Yeah, fine. A bit down."

"Down?"

"She's just having a hard time with the war." Remus felt butterflies in his stomach, but continued bravely, "I think we all are, aren't we?"

Sirius was quiet for a bit, and Remus couldn't see his face, only the top of his head, but he knew he was thinking. Finally, he whispered,

"Yeah. We are."

* * *

Friday 21st December 1979

It wasn't exactly a breakthrough - they still didn't talk about the war any more than they really needed to - but it felt good enough at the time. And while it felt cathartic to admit that they were both struggling, there was nothing that could be done to improve things. People were still dying, the death eaters were still gaining power, Sirius and James were still super heroes.

As Christmas approached, no one felt very merry. They would not be spending the day at the Potters' this year - in early December both of James's parents were admitted to St Mungo's. They'd contracted dragon pox, which was so contagious it meant that just visiting them was a mission in itself.

When Sirius heard the diagnosis he locked himself in the bathroom for two hours. Remus did a bit of research and found out why - elderly people rarely survived the disease. So that became another thing they didn't talk about.

James practically lived at the hospital, when he wasn't meeting with Moody or on an assignment somewhere. Lily told Remus that he'd had to pick up a lot of Fleamont's work, and that he was up until the small hours every night working in his father's study.

"I wish I could help him," she said mournfully, "He's not ready to lose them yet, it's too cruel."

Remus agreed. In what sort of a world could people like Voldemort and Greyback live while Mr and Mrs Potter died?

Remus didn't realise how dark things had become until late December, when he got an unexpected phone call.

Sirius was out - he and James had been sent to West Cork to follow up on some reports of a black magic ritual taking place. Remus had been alone all day, trying to distract himself as each minute crawled by with no news. Sirius had left him his compact mirror, in case anything happened, and Remus had spent the past hour staring at it.

When the phone rang he practically jumped out of his skin, then leapt to answer it.

“Hello?!” Logically he knew it couldn’t be bad news - wizards never used phones if they could help it - but his voice shook all the same.

“‘Ello!” A voice boomed - it was so cheerful it couldn’t possibly be anyone Remus knew. Must be a wrong number.

“Hello?” Remus frowned, “I’m sorry, I think you have--”

--Reeeeemus!” Grant sang down the phone. He sounded drunk, and there was a lot of noise behind him, “Come down to the Sawyer’s Arms!”

“Where’s that?”

“Bloomsbury! Come onnnn! We’re all celebrating!”

“Celebrating? What? With who?”

“My mates!”

Remus felt a sinking feeling.

“...ok, give me an hour.”

“Weeeeeey!” Grant hung up abruptly.

Remus got up to change his clothes.

He didn’t want to go. Not where there were muggles. Not where there were *people*, but Grant was definitely drunk, and the last time Remus had seen him drunk he had needed help. He sounded perky enough on the phone, but Remus wanted to be sure. Besides. He needed a distraction; he couldn’t sit about in the flat all evening.

He shoved the mirror in his jeans pocket, pulled on a jumper, then his coat and scarf, and headed out into the wintry London streets. He got the tube to Holborn; the streets were too busy with Christmas revellers to apparate safely, and he wanted to take a convincing amount of time to arrive.

The Sawyer’s Arms was a proper old man’s pub; thick red and yellow carpet, etched glass windows, grimy brass fixtures. It was foggy inside with cigarette smoke, but Remus managed to track Grant down without much bother - he was sitting in a large corner booth, surrounded by a group of young people who looked about their age. Ah, Remus realised - they were *students*.

“Reeee-musssss!” Grant cheered, raising both arms in greeting as Remus entered the pub. “You caaaaame!”

“Sorry I’m late,” Remus said, shyly. The people sitting at Grant’s table all looked friendly enough, but they were still strangers.

“Lads,” Grant slurred loudly, addressing the group of men and women, “This is Remusss, my very *oldest* friend. ‘E went to a posh private school an’ evvvry-fin’. Dead clever.”

Remus waved awkwardly at everyone, then turned to Grant, “I see you’ve been celebrating.”

“Too bloody right! ‘Ere, got you a pint.” He pushed a glass across the table, and it slid a bit fast, the table slick with spilled beer. Remus darted forward to grab the drink before it flew off the edge.

“Thanks,” he raised it slightly, then drank. Ah. It had been a while since he’d been in a pub. The lager went down very smoothly.

“We’re celebratin’!” Grant said, beaming at him, “End of exams, innit!”

“Oh, congratulations,” Remus smiled, pulling up a stool and perching on the end of the table. “What do you all study?”

They went around introducing themselves - Remus was never going to remember everyone’s name - Suzie was doing Accountancy - she was a small, mousy girl with huge round glasses and a pimple on the end of her nose. Rajesh wanted to study Engineering at Kings, but he needed to get a better Maths result first, Tim - a tall, blokey man in a rugby shirt - was doing social studies. Martine was Tim’s girlfriend, studying for her nursing qualification. They were all pretty tipsy, but Grant was drunkest of all.

Remus introduced himself as best he could - he told them he was studying ancient languages, because he was actually very good at Runes, and rarely got the opportunity to show off about it. He needn’t have worried about Grant - these new friends were a world away from the sort he’d been mixing with a few years ago.

The drinks kept coming, too. Remus tried to be polite, and turn down each round, but it was no good - everyone was in a Christmas mood. Three beers in, so was Remus. The pub music alternated between Slade, Wizard, Cliff Richards and Shakin’ Stevens, there was tinsel hanging from the sconces on the walls, and even the barmen were wearing party hats. Remus had half forgotten about the season - there was no time for this sort of fun any more.

At about half-eight he heard a voice in his pocket, and hurried into the gent’s to check the mirror. It was Sirius.

“All’s well,” he said, looking very ruffled, black smudges streaking his face, “Both ended up covered in ash, though - don’t ask - going to wash off at Prongs’ then have something to eat - be a while yet.”

“As long as you’re ok!” Remus said, earnestly.

“Yeah, we’re fine,” Sirius nodded gravely. Then he frowned, peering up at Remus through the mirror. “Where are you? At home?”

“Pub.” Remus said, guiltily.

“With Mary?”

“No, with... um. With Grant. He’s celebrating the end of exams.”

“Oh, celebrating.” Sirius’s face turned stony.

“I got invited out, that’s all.” Remus said, “I was going mad in the flat by myself.”

“Ok, Moony,” Sirius gave him an odd look, “Have fun.”

“I can come to Prongs’ if you wan--” Remus started, but Sirius’s face had gone.

Remus left the loo’s and ordered a round for everyone. He didn’t have any money, so he cast a glamour on a scrap of paper he found in his pocket, and the barman thought it was a twenty pound note - he even gave Remus change.

If Sirius was allowed to stay at James's and have a nice dinner and take his sweet time getting home, then Remus didn't see why he shouldn't be allowed to get steaming drunk in the pub with a bunch of muggles.

They stayed for a few more hours, talking about TV and music and clothes and films, and other gloriously mundane muggle things. Eventually, one by one, the others said their goodbyes and left.

Suzie was the last to get up. She whispered to Remus, "Will you make sure he gets home ok?" Nodding at Grant, who had fallen under the table looking for his bus pass, and was now sitting on the floor giggling to himself.

"Yeah, no worries," Remus nodded, feeling a bit giggly himself.

"Merry Christmas, Remus, it was lovely to meet you," she smiled, pulling on her coat.

"Yeah, you too."

Once she'd left, Remus knocked back the dregs of his pint and decided that would be it. "Oi," he gave a gentle kick under the table, "C'mon, you, time to go."

"Nah, let's stay out!"

"How many have you had?" Remus asked, hands on his hips. He was feeling pretty tipsy, and Remus's tolerance was higher than most.

"A few," Grant said, pulling himself up, shaking the whole table. Remus got a hand under his elbow to steady him, and began to guide him towards the doors.

"Where are you living these days?"

"You know where," Grant hiccupped, "Brighton."

"Brighton?!"

"Yeah, s'fine, just stick me on the last train."

"No," Remus said, "You'll get arrested or something. Come on, you can kip on my couch."

"Awww," Grant grinned.

They staggered onto the tube together, and at Leicester Square the escalator was switched off, so they had to climb it, and were breathless by the time they reached ground level.

"I need a fag," Remus gasped, patting his pockets for his cigarette case.

His fingers brushed against the compact mirror instead, and he felt a quiet twinge of dread as he wondered whether Sirius was home. Not that anything untoward was going on - he just didn't want to start the fight that was brewing *just* yet.

Giving up on the cigarette, he steered Grant towards Chinatown. The streets were still quite busy, light and laughter spilling out from the soho bars and sleazy picturehouses.

"Whaddidya think of Tim?" Grant slurred, leaning heavily against Remus, "Reckon I'm in wiv a chance?"

"I thought he was seeing Martine?"

“Pffft.”

“He’s er... very tall?”

“‘E’s strong,” Grant said, decisively, “Like me a strong bloke. S’how I know you an’ me’d never work out.”

“Oi!” Remus took umbrage, “I’m stronger than I look!”

Grant scoffed at him, laughing, and Remus was drunk enough to take this as a challenge to his manhood. He didn’t often go in for displays of masculine bravado, but maybe the beer was having some influence. Acting quickly, and barely thinking, he bent and grabbed Grant around the legs, lifting him up and hauling him over his shoulder.

Grant was yelping and spluttering with laughter as Remus jogged with him a good few yards,

“Put me down!” He shrieked, “You’ve proved your point, you’re very strong!”

“That’s all I needed to hear,” Remus smirked, stopping to set Grant down, carefully. Still unsteady on his feet, Grant grasped Remus’s shoulder for support, choking laughter and grinning madly.

“Ooo-oooooh, what’s this then?” A nasty, sneering voice came from behind them.

Grant stiffened, and his back straightened; he stared forward and lowered his head, making to ignore the danger brewing, but Remus was a bit pissed, and couldn’t help looking back.

Three men were approaching, their faces were cast into shadow by the unreliable streetlights and tall buildings, but their body language could not be misread; the rounded shoulders, balled up fists and wide gait. Masculine bravado.

“Ignore them,” Grant breathed, his lips barely moving, “Come on, quick.”

But Remus had never been very good at running away from a threat.

“Can I help you?”

The men sniggered meanly, still advancing. One spoke to another, as if Grant and Remus were deaf - or just not worth addressing at all.

“Looks like a couple’a nancy boys to me, couple’a dirty queers out looking for trouble.”

“If they’re looking for trouble,” another said, “I know where they can get it.” He slammed his fist into his open hand, as if to demonstrate.

“Remus...” Grant hissed, tugging on his coat, “Come *on* !”

Remus ignored him. He faced the three men, and raised his chin. Using his very politest private-school voice, he said,

“Move along, gentlemen, before I do something you’ll regret.”

The men crowed with laughter, and did not move alone. Remus was glad. His lips curled, he shifted position, legs apart, and stared them down. With a slight turn of his wrist, they froze to the spot. It took them a second to realise what had happened, their gormless faces now visible in the red light of a neon ‘SEXXX’ sign flashing in the shop window next to them.

They stared at each other, tried to move their legs, but were fixed in place, as if they'd stepped into quick-setting concrete.

"What the fuck?!" One of them grunted angrily.

"Don't be scared, boys," Remus grinned, rather enjoying himself, "I don't bite. Often."

"I'm gonna fucking batter ya, yer poof!" One of the men yelled, "I'm gonna beat the piss out of ya!"

That gave Remus an excellent idea. He snapped his fingers quickly, and watched the men's faces. One by one, a look of horror crossed each of them, and Remus caught the scent moments before their jeans began to visibly darken.

"Poor loves," Remus chuckled. Even Grant stopped tugging his sleeve, then, and stared in disbelief.

"Have you *pissed* yourselves?!"

The three humiliated men started shouting insults then - each one worse than the last, but it didn't matter. Remus and Grant were both practically hysterical.

"Come on," Remus said, slinging an arm around Grant's shoulder, "Let's go."

He did not release them until they were two streets away, locked inside the flat.

It was hugely risky, doing magic on a busy street in central London in front of muggles. But Remus couldn't work himself up to feel guilty about it; he was jubilant. It didn't seem like Grant understood what had happened - he was pretty drunk, and mostly just relieved to be safe, so Remus thought he'd got away with it. Back in the flat he cracked out the whisky to toast his own success - this was met with roaring approval from Grant.

Sirius wasn't back yet, and Remus decided not to care about that, either. Most likely he'd decided to stay at the Potters' for the night. Remus dug out some blankets and pillows to make up a bed on the couch for Grant, and then they settled in for another few hours of drinking and smoking and laughing. Time began to warp; stretching and contracting the more intoxicated Remus grew.

It must have been almost two in the morning when they hit the bottom of the bottle. Remus ran his finger around the bottom of his glass tumbler, then sucked it.

"Ungh." Grant whined from the sofa, "Gotta give up the booze. New year's resolution."

"Ha." Remus barked, slouching down in his armchair, rolling a cigarette.

"Remusss?" Grant asked, dopily, his head lolling over the arm of the couch, blonde curls tumbling back from his upside-down face.

"Yeah?" Remus slurred in response.

"Can I ask you summink?"

"Yeah."

"ave you got a plan?"

"A plan?" Remus frowned, confused and bleary.

“For what you’re gonna do wiv your life, y’know.”

“Oh.” Remus scratched his head, arms slow and heavy. “I dunno. You?”

“Dunno.” Grant sighed. “Been thinking. Maybe I wanna just find a girl or summink. Get married.”

“Get *married* ?!” Remus choked. “Christ, you’re pissed.”

“It might not be awful!” Grant defended himself, “Don’t mind spending time wiv girls. They can be fun.”

“Yeah, but... y’know, if you got married you’d be expected to...” Remus gestured delicately. Grant snorted.

“She might not wanna do it much. Anyway, might not hate it. Never given it a try, ‘ave I?”

Remus put his fag between his teeth, thoughtfully. “I did, once.”

“Oh yeah?” Grant sat up interested, “And?”

“It was ok.” He shrugged, lighting up. “Not much to say about it really. Mostly just embarrassing. But we’re still friends and stuff.”

“Can’t be that bad then.” Grant sighed, leaning back once more. He looked sad, and Remus wished he knew how to cheer him up. Grant reached his hand out towards Remus, who sighed and handed him the newly lit cigarette. He began to roll another.

Grant sighed, rolling his head back and blowing plumes of smoke up at the ceiling. “They just always let me down, that’s all. Men.”

“Not always,” Remus said, not liking the melancholy turn things were taking.

“No,” Grant replied wistfully, glancing up, meeting Remus’s eye, “No, I s’pose you never did.”

Remus felt a flutter of warm pleasure at that - though maybe it was because he was just so drunk. Grant was still staring at him intensely, and smiling a bit now. Something passed between them. A very small thing; but something.

The door opened and Sirius entered, bringing the winter chill in with him. He stopped in his tracks when he saw Grant, who scrambled to sit up right.

“...hello.” Sirius said, eyes darting back and forth cautiously. Remus never had guests over - let alone muggles.

“Hiya mate!” Grant stood up quickly, extending a hand across the coffee table, the empty whisky bottle on top. Sirius shook it, politely.

“Grant’s celebrating the end of his exams,” Remus explained, feeling guilty but not sure why.

“Oh, congratulations,” Sirius nodded, his expression guarded.

“Cheers!” Grant grinned, “‘ave a drink? Oh bugger, we’ve ‘ad it all...”

“It’s fine.” Sirius folded his arms across his chest and raised an eyebrow, putting on his bored aristocrat routine. “I’m going to bed.”

He didn't give Remus so much as a second glance, just walked through the living room, down the hall to the bedroom.

"Ave I got you in trouble?" Grant whispered. Remus shook his head,

"He's just tired. I'd better..."

"Oh yeah, 'course. I'm knackered, anyway - thanks again for letting me stay."

"Any time." Remus smiled, meaning it, "Thanks for inviting me out. I really needed it." He patted Grant's shoulder as he left.

Sirius was undressing. He ignored Remus, who closed the door quietly behind himself and sat on the end of the bed.

"How did the mission go?" He asked, gently, "Is James--"

"A muggle in the flat, Remus?!" Sirius snapped, "Did you even *think* about the danger?!"

"What danger?" Remus frowned, confused.

"There's a war on! This place is supposed to be a safe house, it's supposed to be locked down tighter than Gringotts!"

"Funny." Remus said, flatly, "I thought it was supposed to be our home."

Sirius didn't respond, just glowered, tying the string on his pyjama bottoms. Remus rubbed the back of his neck, sighing, "Look, he lives in Brighton; I couldn't have just abandoned him at a train station, he was plastered." Remus tried to explain.

"So the solution was to get even more plastered?" Sirius shot back.

"*Sonoro Quiescis*." Remus said, casting a silencing charm on the bedroom - the first time they'd needed it since Hogwarts. "If you want a fight," he said, stretching his arms out invitingly, "Let's go, I'm more than happy to oblige."

"I don't want to fight, I want to sleep." Sirius said.

"Ok, fine." Remus shrugged. He pulled off his jumper, t-shirt coming with it, and began changing for bed too. Sirius got in under the duvet and watched him, still scowling. He definitely did want a fight.

"Can't *believe* you just went out to get pissed."

"It's Christmas." Remus muttered, "Sorry if I wanted to squeeze a tiny bit of joy out of the season."

"You couldn't wait, could you? The second I left the house you had to--"

"You're *always* leaving! Am I supposed to sit around worrying myself sick all night?! I still exist when you're not here, you know, I still need to talk to people sometimes."

"Ha!" Sirius scoffed, "*You* want someone to pour your heart out to, all of a sudden? That's rich."

"Go fuck yourself!" Remus yelled at the top of his voice.

"Go and fuck your muggle! That's obviously what he's here for!" Sirius shot back. Remus reeled

as if he'd been struck. He stared at Sirius, and saw the hurt in his eyes. Was this all just boring old run-of-the-mill jealousy?

Remus forced himself to relax, to lower his shoulders and unclench his jaw. He closed his eyes, breathing in.

“Grant’s on the couch because he’s my friend and I didn’t want any harm to come to him.” He said, very steadily. “And I’m in here with you, because there’s nobody else I’d rather be in a room with. Even when you’re being a massive tosser.”

Sirius’s lips pursed, then relaxed. He looked very much like he wanted to keep arguing, but had nothing left to say. In the end he just slumped back in the bed, arms folded, and said to the ceiling,

“ *You’re* a massive tosser.”

Remus laughed, finished changing, and climbed onto the bed, crawling towards Sirius.

“I’m *your* massive tosser.” He reached up for the edge of the duvet and pulled it down, peeling it back from Sirius’s body. Sirius allowed it, watching Remus, who started to untangle the knot of string on Sirius’s pyjama bottoms. He pulled those down next, and licked his lips. “Let me make it up to you?”

Sirius bit his lip, nodded, then arched his back, and they didn’t speak again for hours.

In the morning, Grant had gone.

Chapter End Notes

Songs:

- I Wanna Be Straight - Ian Drury & The Blockheads (one of my fave songs atm - 'straight' as in mending your ways/going legit, rather than heterosexual.)
- Duchess - The Stranglers (the song Sirius is singing to himself in the garage - also headcanon this as Mary's theme song lol)

British-isms

- Tube - the London Underground transport system. Sirius and Remus live in Chinatown/Soho, so their nearest station is Leicester Square.
- Old man's pub - the kind of pub old men go to. Actually that one's hard to explain unless you've been out drinking in the UK.
- Everything Grant says - I kind of write his speech phonetically, and he has a strong London accent (mostly dropping h's/turning 'th' sounds into 'v' sounds), so let me know if it's just impossible to understand and I'll soften it.

The War: Spring & Summer 1980

Chapter Summary

Sad endings and happy beginnings.

CW death of parents

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

You know I'm born to lose,

and gambling's for fools.

But that's the way I like it baby

I don't wanna live forever

That January, just over a year after his mother's funeral, Remus attended another memorial service - this time for Fleamont and Euphemia Potter.

They passed away within hours of each other in the final bleak days of December. Their loss was felt immensely, and not only by the members of the Order. The Potter mansion was full for weeks with visitors, mourners and old friends, and every one of them had a story of some kindness James's parents had performed.

"Euphemia always said I could ask her *anything* when I saw her at St Mungo's." Marlene sobbed, "She was such a brilliant healer, I wish I'd known her longer."

"They were so kind to us after we eloped," Andromeda said, holding Ted's hand and bouncing her daughter on her hip, "Checked in on us all the time, made sure we never struggled for anything... I just can't believe they're gone..."

"If our home is even half as welcoming as theirs, I'll be proud." Arthur Weasley added, cleaning his glasses, which had grown misty.

"The very best of wizard kind," Dumbledore intoned in the speech he gave at the service. "A beacon of understanding, tolerance, good humour and community - all those values we hold most dear."

"Sort of fitting to have them go at Christmas," one wizened old crone said at the wake, "Always loved coming to the Potters' boxing day party."

"I'll miss Effie's mince pies!" An old man added.

"I'll miss Monty's home brew!" Another cackled. A smatter of fond laughter, followed by tender silence as everyone recalled the Potters' limitless hospitality.

Remus kept his own memories of the Potters to himself, because he felt he had the least claim on them. Still, he would never forget that it was they who had taken him in when he'd found himself homeless at seventeen, and they who had helped him locate his mother.

In a way it was different from the earlier deaths in the Order, because the Potters had died at an advanced age, and they hadn't been murdered - so there was more room for happy memories.

It still didn't feel very fair. Time is meaningless, when it comes to the people you love, Remus reflected. Eleven months had not been enough time with Hope - and twenty years had probably not been enough for James.

Sirius, Peter and Remus silently made the decision to pull together for James. He had been the source of the marauders' strength ever since they were children; had selflessly defended or supported each of them at one time or another, and there was no question that they return the favour now, in his darkest hour.

They took up the task of greeting as many of the droppers-by as possible, and keeping them away from James, who had quite enough to deal with. For a solid two weeks, the three of them spent their days accepting bunches of flowers and pots of home cooking (which was useful, because Gully the house elf had been inconsolable, and spent his time curled up under the aga sobbing and drinking butterbeer). Lily handled everything financial or legal - Remus couldn't help but admire how quickly she took to wizard property law - while Alice and Molly helped her manage the house and pack up the things which needed to be packed up.

It was grimly fitting that 1980 began with death. Years later, it would mark a turning point in the war for Remus; as if losing the Potters had shaken the very foundations of reality. After their funeral less and less things began to make sense. Things he had once felt sure of became uncertain, and the - already small - circle of people he trusted and loved began to shrink further.

For the rest of January, Sirius and Remus passed each other like ships in the night - one would be up late, the other awake with the dawn for some mission or other. They were both determined to make up the slack for James, and it kept them busier than ever. One or both of them might sleep at the Potters one night, or else stay with someone else in the order, for safety's sake.

Mourning Fleamont and Euphemia on top of all that meant that the short hours they did spend together were filled with silence.

Sirius had cried, the day he found out. They both had, but the pain was more raw for Sirius,

"It's not fair! It's not fair!" He repeated over and over, eyes wild and desperate.

Remus carefully put his own grief aside in order to be the stronger one, and found that things were easier when he focussed his attention on helping Sirius.

It was very hard work, and for a while it seemed there would be nothing at all to feel happy about again. Their only piece of good news came completely out of the blue (as good news generally does) one Sunday in early February.

Sirius was out with James - not on a mission, for once. As boys, James and Sirius had crawled into each others beds whenever one of them was unhappy. As men, they spent long afternoons rocketing around the countryside on Sirius's motorbike. Remus was not jealous - if anything it was a relief that he didn't have to go.

He was spending the afternoon studying counter curses, which at least made him feel like he was

doing something useful. He'd just decided to have a quick break and make himself a pot of tea when an owl pecked on the kitchen window. It bore a note from Lily; '*Can you pop over before five? I'll cook dinner.*' And of course he got ready to leave at once. It was a good thing too - his own supper plans were beans on toast, which he'd already had three times that week.

It was very cold still, the frost hung around for weeks that February, and spring took a lifetime to arrive. Remus was grateful to be able to simply step through the fireplace in their flat and instantly appear in the Potters' living room without having to go outside. He hoped Sirius was wrapped up properly; wind chill was no joke at the speeds he drove.

"I'm here!" Remus called, brushing soot and floo power off his shabby robes.

Hieronymus the cat mewed angrily at him - he had disturbed the warm spot on the rug.

"Kitchen!" Lily called back.

Remus wandered through. The house felt empty, and had for weeks now, but the kitchen was as warm and comforting as it had ever been. Lily was sitting at the broad oak table, pouring over a recipe book, her wand holding her hair up in a messy bun. There was a self stirring pot on the stovetop, and something delicious smelling in the oven.

"Hello gorgeous," she grinned, looking up at him.

"Hiya," he waved, "Can I help with anything?"

"Knives and forks would be great," she nodded at the dresser against the wall. "We'll eat in here, I think, it's cosier."

"Just the two of us?" He asked, going to pull out the cutlery.

"Five," she shook her head, "Peter's due in a minute, and the boys shouldn't be too much longer... well, depending on Sirius."

"Eh?" Remus frowned, the note hadn't mentioned Sirius. Lily was blushing.

"Er... so I asked you here because I have something to tell you..."

Remus's hands began to shake, and he dropped the butterknife he'd been holding. No news was ever good, these days, and he'd developed a bit of a paranoia around announcements.

"It's good!" Lily said, quickly, seeing the look on his face, "I promise! It's just that, er... we thought it might be best, *James* thought it might be best, if he told Sirius on his own, you know, one on one... after what happened last time..."

"Last time?" Remus frowned. They couldn't be getting married again, surely. "You're not splitting up?!"

"Remus, I said a *good* thing!" Lily laughed, lightly. "Honestly, you always think the worst..."

She stood up, clearing her books from the table. Remus took a good look at her. She was a bit thicker around the hips - not that he'd ever say such a thing to one of his oldest and best friends. And anyway, it suited her, she was still uncommonly pretty, in his opinion. But she smelled slightly different, too.

He blinked, and shook his head, slamming the cutlery drawer shut so hard it rattled, and Lily

jumped.

“You’re pregnant!”

She blushed harder, and nodded, face stretched into the broadest smile Remus had seen on anyone in months. Lost for words, he hurried around the table to hug her, “Amazing!” He choked, suddenly very emotional, “Brilliant! Oh my god, Lily!”

“I know!” She squealed, “Due in July! You’ve no idea how hard it’s been to stay quiet!”

Remus stepped back to give her room, and wiped his eyes.

“Not because of Sirius?”

“Not just that...” she conceded, “We wanted a proper mourning period... Euphemia and Fleamont knew, of course. It was heartbreaking telling them. But I have to admit, I am *slightly* concerned about how Sirius will take it...”

“If he says anything other than congratulations I’ll box his ears!” Remus said, fiercely. Lily laughed,

“You’ll have to get in the queue behind me and James.”

Remus laughed, still wiping his eyes, and went to lay the table. No sooner had he set down the last plate, than a rumbling roar could be heard in the distance, getting closer. Lily looked up at him and bit her lip. He just smiled at her,

“It’ll be fine.”

Sirius had been parking his bike on the back patio. Remus often wondered what Euphemia might make of that - but of course she could never refuse her blue eyed boy anything, and would have forgiven the muddy tire marks in her lawn with motherly indulgence.

The patio doors rattled open, and Sirius strode in, hair still windswept from flying, nose and cheeks pink from the cold. He was smiling, smiling so wide that Remus’s heart skipped a beat, and he felt that old schoolboy crush resurface in him.

“Mrs Prongs!” Sirius went straight for Lily, arms wide, and enveloped her, kissing the top of her head, “Bloody brilliant!”

Remus sighed with relief, and went to shake hands with James, who’d come in behind Sirius, hair and scarf flying, wind-burned face glowing like a beacon of joy.

“A kid!” Was all Remus could think to say, “You’re having a fucking kid!”

James laughed, gripping his hand,

“Too bloody right, Moony.”

“Sit down!” Sirius pulled out a chair for Lily, ushering her into it, “Merlin, Moony, what sort of gentleman are you, letting Lily do all the work in her condition?!”

“Oi,” Remus scowled, “I laid the table...”

“Honestly, I’m fine,” Lily giggled, “But if you boys want to serve dinner, be my guest. Lamb’s in the oven, James, it should be done by now.”

So the three of them bustled around the kitchen, making quite a bit more noise and mess than was probably necessary. Sirius began whistling 'Kooks', James cracked out a bottle of champagne to toast (with butterbeer for Lily) and Remus just grinned until his cheeks hurt, watching his friends be happy together.

Then Peter arrived, and it began all over again, their happiness multiplying as they sat down to a perfect family dinner. It was just what everyone needed.

"How did it even happen?!" Peter exclaimed, mopping up gravy with his last yorkshire pudding.

"Well, Wormtail," Sirius smirked, "When a witch and a wizard love each other very much..."

"Shuddup," Peter laughed, kicking him under the table, "You know what I meant..."

"It just happened," James shrugged, "We might have got a little bit careless around Halloween..."

"James!" Lily slapped his arm lightly with the back of her hand, "No need for detail, I'm sure Moony doesn't want to hear all that."

"Why me?" Remus furrowed his brow,

"Oh well... you know, I just know you prefer to be discreet about... um..." Lily fumbled for words. Remus folded his arms, staring at them all with mock-indignation.

"You all think I'm a prude!"

They all burst out laughing, and Sirius patted him on the shoulder affectionately,

"Don't worry, Moony - they just don't know you like I know you."

"What's that supposed to mean--" Peter started, but Remus - seeing where the conversation was heading - quickly intervened,

"Have you got any ideas for a name, yet?"

"No, not really," Lily said, still chuckling, "A family name would be nice, but--"

"Whatever you do," Sirius said, "Call the poor kid something *normal*. No constellations, for godric's sake."

"I'll drink to that," Remus raised his glass and drained it. It was his third, but he didn't think anyone had noticed, and besides, they were celebrating.

"When will you know what it is?" Peter asked

"We're *not* calling it Peter," James teased him.

"Bagsy godfather!" Sirius shouted.

"You can't *bagsy* godfather!" Peter said, outraged,

"Just did," Sirius poked his tongue out.

* * *

And so, as per usual, it was James and Lily who managed to bring everyone out of that gloomy

winter slog, just in time for spring. The marauders and their friends faced the rest of their year with fresh eyes and renewed purpose. Because fighting a war was one thing - but fighting for the Potters' future child made every challenge seem more worthwhile.

What was more, they weren't the only ones celebrating good news. Arthur and Molly welcomed yet another red haired son that March, and Alice announced that she and Frank were also expecting in the summer.

"Imagine that!" Mary said, clearing away tea cups and mugs of coffee left behind from an Order meeting, "Their kids are all going to grow up together, and go to Hogwarts together... it's sort of nice, isn't it?"

Remus nodded in agreement. He would have given anything to be raised by any one of these people; to have a childhood surrounded by magic and love and laughter.

He had never given much thought to children before - his own childhood had been such a disaster he didn't think he was fit to be a parent. But watching James and Lily do it; that actually sounded pretty nice.

Of course, Remus's enthusiasm for 'Baby Prongs' paled in comparison to Sirius's overwhelming excitement.

"It's going to be so much fun, Moony!" he babbled, coming in one May afternoon from another spur of the moment shopping trip, "Imagine them all on brooms! The Order of the Phoenix Quidditch team!"

"Er... how old do you need to be to ride a broom?" Remus asked, eyeing his packages nervously. None of them looked broom-shaped, but you never knew with Sirius.

"These are mostly books and clothes," Sirius reassured him, laughing lightly, "And some toys, just little things..."

"This kid is going to be so spoilt..." Remus tutted.

"Good," Sirius poked his tongue out. "Doesn't do anyone any good to be brought up joyless, does it, Moony?" He raised an eyebrow and Remus ducked his head, ashamed, and he never chastised Sirius about it again.

* * *

In June, after the full moon, Remus was invited for another meeting with Moody and Ferox. A year older and wiser, he requested not to meet them at the Auror's office this time. They agreed - they didn't have much choice. Remus had grown very flippant about his role as unofficial werewolf liaison officer, and it probably showed. At least Moody didn't boss him around much any more.

They met in a small working man's pub just outside of Derby. Remus arrived first and got himself a pint, then sat down with a newspaper he'd picked up at the train station. He took out the page with the crossword on it and folded it up neatly into his breast pocket. Sirius liked doing crosswords.

He chose a seat in the back on the pub, because it was quiet, but also because the seat was a high backed wooden pew, which was good for his back. He was hurting after the last moon, still, and tried to sit straight.

Ferox got there a few minutes later.

“Alright there, our Kev?” He nodded, sitting down on the three legged stool opposite Remus.

They had all received instructions to start using fake names when out on Order business, in case anyone listened in. Remus wasn't overly fond of 'Kevin', but he had to admit it was probably better than his own ridiculous name. When the marauders first heard about the codenames they'd wanted to use Paul, John, George and Ringo, but Moody told them it was too obvious.

“Hello, Norman.” Remus nodded at Ferox.

“Mr Thompson won't be long.”

“Good. Get you a drink?”

“Nah, on duty.”

Remus shrugged and took a glug of his own beer. Ferox watched him with a level expression. “So,” his old teacher asked, “How's tricks?”

“Oh, you know,” Remus shrugged again, “We're all just doing what we can.”

“Hear you've been busy - got a knack for security, eh?”

“Yeah, I've been helping out Alice--er... Steffi. Sorry.”

Ferox laughed gruffly at Remus's blunder,

“Don't worry about it. It's all bollocks anyway. Still, security's a good talent to have , eh? Something you might fancy doing for the ministry, maybe? After all this is over?”

“Security alarms?” Remus frowned. He hadn't really thought about it before. “I dunno, it's not really... I mean, I want to help people, obviously, but I'm not sure if... people don't want someone like me in their homes.”

“Chin up, lad,” Ferox said, kindly, “It's not all doom and gloom.”

Remus drank again. He was nearly finished, and wondered if he would have time for a second pint. Probably not. Not very professional. Though, it was *technically* medicinal - his back really hurt.

Moody - 'Mr Thompson' - arrived a few moments later. He was looking more haggard than ever. The war seemed to affect him physically - he had accumulated more scars than anyone Remus knew (except himself, maybe). In return, he had lost more body parts - if Moody wasn't more careful, Remus thought, he'd end up like old professor Kettleburn.

“Kevin, Norman,” Moody nodded at them both.

He was wearing muggle clothes - or at least his approximation of them. A gaudy hawaiian shirt paired with ancient looking mustard yellow bell-bottoms. Remus had to concentrate to keep a straight face.

“I'll get straight to business,” he said, taking the third stool around the table. “He's been seen again. Our mutual acquaintance.”

That meant Greyback. Remus swallowed, nodding,

“Where?”

“Outside of Dublin. We reckon he’s been keeping a low profile; licking his wounds, but he’s still in you-know-who’s pay.”

Remus nodded again. He’d known Greyback wouldn’t be vanquished so easily; he’d always known they would meet again, eventually.

“The good news is,” Ferox said, leaning in, “He hasn’t been recruiting - all sources seem to say that most of his pack have left him.”

“Sources?” Remus looked at him, sharply.

“Well,” Ferox grinned, “I took a little trip to the emerald isle last week.”

“You what?!” Remus was shaken by this news. “You could have been killed!”

“Calm down, lad,” Moody said, laying his palm on the table. “Norman here’s been on this case since you were a nipper. He knows what he’s doing.”

“Ah, he’s just worried, eh Kev?” Ferox nudged him.

Remus didn’t respond. How could he tell these two men - who were older, more experienced, wiser, and probably more powerful than him - that they were being idiots? It was completely ridiculous that even fifteen years after Lyall Lupin’s death the ministry continued to underestimate Greyback. Refused to learn anything from their mistakes.

“You should have told me.” He said, finally. “I could have helped. Advised you, at least.”

“I didn’t go alone, don’t worry,” Ferox smiled, “I took young Daniel with me - I mean, er... no, bugger, I’ve forgotten it...”

“Danny?!” Remus balked, even more alarmed, “But...”

“It was nothing personal,” Moody said, “You know more about them than anyone, but after last year, you’re just too close, too recognisable to the pack. We couldn’t risk it.”

“I wish you’d told me.” Remus repeated, though he knew it was getting him nowhere.

“We’re telling you now.”

Remus pursed his lips. Danny McKinnon! Greyback must be laughing at them; they just had no idea.

“So, what, then?” He asked, knowing he was visibly irritated now. “What do you need from me?”

“Well, we know he’s on the move. He left Dublin after the last full moon, without a trace. Him and a young female.”

“Livia,” Remus said.

“You know who she is?”

“It’s most likely her,” Remus nodded, “She’s his most loyal supporter, she’ll never leave him.”

“Could you give us a description? Daniel caught a scent, but we didn’t get eyes on her.” Ferox said, eagerly.

Remus nodded.

“Ok. But you need to tell me, next time--”

“Fine, fine,” Moody shook his head impatiently, “We’ll keep you in the loop, *where possible and within reason* . Now, what can you tell us about this Livia bitch?”

Remus told them as much as he knew. He felt he was re-treading old territory, but no one ever listened to him anyway. He explained what Livia looked like - that was easy enough, she was hardly an ordinary looking witch.

“We’ll get them lad, don’t you worry,” Ferox said as he shook Remus’s hand before leaving. He had completely missed the point.

They hadn’t tracked down Castor’s pack - if they were still a pack. Moody thought they’d left the country, and Remus hoped so. He hoped no one ever found them again. By the time they were all ready to go, Remus needed a shot, never mind another pint - his back was twinging with every step, threatening a full on spasm. And he was in a seriously bad mood.

He apparated back to London, and pushed his front door open so hard the knob banged against the plasterboard.

“Fucking hell!” Sirius jumped out of his seat on the couch.

Remus blinked at him, embarrassed.

“Sorry. Didn’t know you were in.”

“What happened?”

“Bloody Moody! Bloody *Ferox* !” Remus winced as he pulled off his jacket.

“Does your back still hurt?” Sirius cocked his head, sympathetically. “Come here.” He shuffled back on the couch, pulling his knees up so that Remus could sit in front of him.

Remus did, and closed his eyes, sighing gratefully as Sirius began to rub his shoulders firmly, wringing the pain out with his clever fingers.

“What happened?” He asked, “They’re not... you don’t have to go again, do you?”

“No,” Remus said, “No, just... I dunno, do you ever feel like everyone thinks you’re just some idiotic kid who doesn’t know anything?”

“No one thinks that.” Sirius soothed.

“I know *you lot* don’t, but... ugh. They just don’t listen to me. I know more about the werewolves than anyone in the Order. I’m Greyback’s prodigal son, for god’s sake!”

“Don’t say that.” Sirius suddenly wrapped his arms around Remus’s waist, pulling him close and tight, as if he was about to bolt. “If Moody and Ferox keep you away from that monster then good.”

Remus leaned into Sirius, and didn’t say any more.

* * *

Will you stay in our lovers' story?

If you stay, you won't be sorry,

'cuz we believe in you.

Soon you'll grow, so take a chance

On a couple of kooks, hung up on romancing.

31st July 1980

"Remus, wake up!" Sirius shook him hard.

"Piss off." Remus grunted, covering his head with the duvet, "S'the middle of the night."

"Who cares?! Come on, it's time! Baby Prongs is on his way - or her way... their way!"

"What?!" Remus sat bolt upright in bed, "Fuck!"

"That's the spirit!" Sirius cheered, "Get dressed!"

Remus scrambled out of bed, and got dressed so fast he tripped over his trouser legs twice, banging his head on the dresser.

"Ow." He grumbled, rubbing his forehead as he joined Sirius in the living room.

"Silly sod," Sirius said fondly, "Lucky Marlene'll be there, eh?"

"I have a feeling she'll be busy..."

Sirius walked into the fireplace, grabbing some floo powder. Just as he was about to throw it down, he gave Remus a funny look, cocking his head, "Moony, your shirt's on inside out. **Potter Manor.**"

And with a blaze of green flame, he was gone. Remus looked down at his shirt. The buttons were on the inside. Damn. Ah well, he was too sleepy, and too jittery to sort it out now. He took a handful of floo powder and walked into the fireplace next.

He stepped out into the Potters' living room, which currently resembled a train station waiting room. Gully came scuttling through, arms piled high with blankets, and Mary, Peter, Sirius and Arthur Weasley were standing about, talking.

"Remus!" Mary gave him a quick hug. "Your shirt's inside out," she said, smoothing a hand over his chest.

"Any news?" He asked.

"James sent a patronus for Marlene about two hours ago - she was staying at mine to be closer to St Mungo's, so I came too. They've been upstairs ever since, I asked if there was anything I could do, but you know what Marls is like when she's got a job to do..."

"James is up there too?" Remus glanced at the ceiling nervously. He'd never say so, but he had an absolute horror of childbirth. He wasn't one hundred percent sure what it involved, other than a lot of screaming and probably blood too.

“D’you think they need anything?” Sirius said, wandering towards the stairs.

“Ms McKinnon will have it all under control,” Arthur said, cheerfully, “James won’t be doing anything more useful than holding Lily’s hand, I promise you. Sit down lads, I’m afraid we’re all in for a very long wait.”

They all did, quietly. There was a funny atmosphere - no one except Arthur had ever experienced this sort of worry before, and Remus was very glad he was there. Mary got up and drew the curtains back. It was the peak of summer, and the sun was already full in the sky, birds singing and the muggle milkman whistling as he made his rounds.

“Tea, anyone?” Remus said, feeling the need to do something useful. He eyed Peter, who was leaning on his elbow, head nodding, “Or coffee maybe?”

“Good man, Moony,” Sirius nodded, “I’ll help.”

In the kitchen, they found that Gully had already laid out the things for tea, and set some water to boil in the big copper kettle on the hob, so Remus and Sirius only needed to bother with the coffee. They did this quietly, though Remus caught Sirius’s eye once or twice and couldn’t help but smile at the boyish excitement he saw there.

Just as they were about to bring the trays through to the living room, a door upstairs slammed open, and footsteps could be heard on the landing.

“Padfoot?!” James’s voice.

“Prongs?!” Siris ran through to the hallway, leaning over the stair bannister and staring upwards. Remus hurried to join him, and Peter was not far behind.

James peered down at them, red faced, misty eyes and beaming.

“It’s a boy!”

Harry. That was the name they’d decided on, according to Marlene, who came down to gratefully accept a cup of tea and sank slowly into the couch. She had dark rings under her eyes, but smiled at everybody anyway.

“Lightning fast delivery,” she murmured, sipping the milky brew slowly, “Twenty minutes active labour!”

“Maybe he’ll be a chaser, like James!” Peter said, eagerly.

“Is Lily ok?” Mary asked.

Marlene nodded, “Of course she is. Nothing stops Evans.”

“I’ll be off, then,” Arthur said, standing up and fastening his threadbare cloak, “I’ve been away from Molly and the boys too long already - I’ll let Dumbledore know the good news, of course.”

They all said goodbye. Once he’d gone, Sirius went to the stairs again to look up.

“Sirius, love,” Marlene called sharply, “Give them a bit of time alone, eh? Family time.”

“Oh, ok.” He nodded, turning back to the room and leaning in the door frame. He stared into space for a while, and for once Remus couldn’t guess what he was thinking. Sirius shook his head slowly, and said, “Harry Potter,” very low.

“It’s a nice name, I think.” Mary said, brightly. She glanced at Marlene and stifled a giggle, “Better than Neville, eh?”

Marlene giggled too, guiltily, “Oh, don’t, I could barely keep a straight face when Frank told me.”

Remus got up and went to stand with Sirius. He threaded their fingers together.

“You’re a godfather,” he whispered. Sirius turned his head towards Remus, smiling,

“Yeah,” he nodded, “... blimey, I really hope I don’t balls it up.”

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning of 'Spring' is Ace of Spades by Motorhead

Song midway through is 'Kooks' by David Bowie

Bagsy - claiming something, children's slang (like 'shotgun'). Bags-ee.

The War: Autumn & Winter 1980

Chapter Summary

Warnings for gore/violence and minor character death.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

You done too much, much too young

You're married with a kid when you could be having fun with me

You done too much, much too young

Now you're married with a son when you should be having fun with me

Don't wanna be rich, don't wanna be famous

Ain't he cute? No he ain't.

He's just another burden on the welfare state.

Wednesday 3rd September 1980

Whooosh - splash.

Remus landed on his feet - just about - right in a muddy puddle in the middle of the high street.

“Bugger.” He muttered, yanking his cloak up out of the way - his boots were beyond saving, socks already soaked through. He hadn’t realised the holes were that bad, it was definitely time for a new pair, he’d need to check his savings.

It looked like it might rain later, too. Bloody *perfect* .

Remus was in a very bad mood, and wet feet were the least of it. Still, he was in Hogsmeade for a reason, and he knew he just had to pull his (metaphorical) socks up and get on with it. He wished he wasn’t alone, but even if someone had been available to come with him (James had the baby, Lily and Sirius were in Broadstairs on reconnaissance, Marlene, Peter and Mary were all working), he’d been told to come alone. As usual.

He trudged towards the Three Broomsticks, thinking at least there would be a nice warm fire and maybe a nip of whisky waiting for him. He’d need it. Whenever he was summoned to meet someone alone, it was usually werewolf business, and that always required a stiff drink. He hoped it was news of Greyback rather than Castor.

It began to spit rain as he came within sight of the pub, and he jogged a bit to save the rest of his clothes from damp. It was a quiet afternoon in the little scottish village - the students of Hogwarts would be in their lessons, the wizards who lived in town would be at their occupations. And very

few people left the house these days, if they didn't have to.

The pub was nice and empty. Remus felt a stab of nostalgia as he entered, remembering how only two short years ago he and his friends had all sat in one of the booths, bright-eyed and naive, looking forward to their futures. Who could have known that saving the world would be such a grey, monotonous slog?

"Remus Lupin, as I live and breathe!" Rosmerta chirped from the bar, one hand on her round hip, bosom overflowing as usual. She glanced hopefully over his shoulder, "Black not joining you?"

Remus shook his head, and went to take a seat near the hearth, so he could at least try to dry out his shoes.

"Not today, Rosmerta," he said, trying to affect good cheer, "Could I get a glass of--"

"Two glasses -- of butterbeer, please," a familiar voice intoned. Remus whipped around, finding himself face to face with Dumbledore.

"Oh, h-hello, professor." Remus said, embarrassed.

"Remus," Dumbledore nodded politely. He never called him 'Mr Lupin', not since Remus had asked him not to, years ago. "Please, be seated," he gestured grandly, like a vicar about to give a sermon.

Remus sat. Dumbledore always made him feel eleven years old.

"How have you been?" His old headmaster asked, kindly, gracefully taking the armchair opposite. He set down a heavy looking leather briefcase on the rug between them. Remus eyed it warily, but answered,

"Well, thanks. You know."

"These are difficult times." Dumbledore said, and Remus didn't respond to that, because he wasn't sure he was supposed to.

Rosmerta bustled over with the butterbeers, setting them down on the little round side table. When she'd left, Remus lifted his tankard and drank, just for a distraction. He could pretend it was alcohol, maybe that would help steady him. He desperately wanted a cigarette, but for some reason that felt wrong in front of Dumbledore. So he just sipped the butterbeer, feeling the cloying syrupy mixture rest on his tongue, slide down his throat.

"You must be wondering why I asked you here," Dumbledore said, watching him.

"Is it... is it... Greyback?" Remus whispered. Dumbledore smiled,

"You needn't worry about eavesdroppers, Remus, we are quite safe to speak freely here. No, alas, there have been no further reports of Greyback or the young lady he is travelling with."

"Oh." Remus blinked. Well then what?

"This is rather a more pressing matter - or at least, it will be, if I am correct."

"Right..." Remus shifted uncomfortably. He was not usually the go-to agent when it came to 'pressing matters'. Dumbledore seemed to read his mind.

"I am in need of someone with a keen eye for detail, and a good deal of patience." He leaned

forward and opened the briefcase a crack. Remus peered inside.

“Books!” He said, surprised. There must be a hundred of them inside - some sort of extension charm perhaps.

“Indeed,” Dumbledore smiled, closing the briefcase again.

“So... you need some research done?”

“I do indeed. Tell me, Remus, how much do you know about prophecy?”

“Er... well I never took Divination,” he scratched his head. He was intrigued now, “But obviously it comes up a bit in Runes... I’ve read a bit.”

“You will need to read a lot more,” Dumbledore said, gravely, “And I must impress upon you both the importance of this task, and the sensitivity. Anything you learn must be kept entirely confidential, do you understand?”

“I... of course,” Remus nodded, slightly alarmed. “But what do you want me to look for?”

“For now, we are simply seeking a fuller understanding of the nature of prophecy. Many of these books contain secret transcripts - some of which may need translating - of known prophetic and oracular statements. I should like to know if there are any which appear to relate to Voldemort, or to this particular moment in history.”

“So... you think someone might have already made a prophecy? About how the war ends?”

“They may have.” The professor replied, shortly. “But we cannot afford to make any rash decisions. While there is still time, I would like to know as much as we can.”

Dumbledore switched between ‘I’ and ‘we’ regularly, when he spoke about the war, Remus noticed. Still, he thought he pretty much understood,

“Ok.” He said, “How shall I let you know, if I find anything?”

“I shall come to you.” Dumbledore replied, cryptically. “Once again, Remus, I cannot overstate the importance of this task. You must tell nobody, understood?”

“Understood.”

That meant not telling Sirius, or James, or any one of his friends. Sometimes Remus wondered if secrets were simply his lot in life. He thought for a moment, “Professor?”

“Yes?”

“Should I keep an eye out for prophecies that have been prevented - or--” he re-phrased, because he knew that was impossible, “Circumvented? I mean, I don’t know loads about it, but there are always loopholes, aren’t there?”

Dumbledore’s eyes glittered, and a small smile played on his lips.

“Very good, Remus.”

* * *

Friday 24th October 1980

And that was how Remus spent much of his autumn. He studied well into October. It wasn't bad at all - actually, he enjoyed it. He'd always liked research, and though he missed the peaceful airy chambers of Hogwarts' library, he was pretty content squirrelled away in the little London flat, with endless pots of tea and a quietly smoking ashtray on hand.

If Sirius came in, he would cast *obfuscate* over his books and notes, and Sirius seemed happy with this arrangement. He understood what needed to be done in the service of the war.

Anyway, they were barely at the flat - Remus only used it to work in. They spent much more of their time at the Potters' mansion, where James's old bedroom had been turned into a nursery, but Sirius's old bedroom was the same as ever, only with half of Remus's things in it too. Together, the marauders and Lily had grown into a funny little family, with baby Harry at the centre.

It took Remus a month or so to really get over his fear of infants - and it still made him a bit anxious to actually hold Harry - but Sirius had been a huge help.

Sirius was utterly besotted with his godson. The child was barely ever out of his arms when they were visiting (a relief for Lily and James, who were only just bearing up under the pressure of parenthood combined with their duties for the Order).

"Say Padfoot, Harry, go on! Pah-d-foo-t..." Sirius cooed one evening, as he bounced the tiny little green-eyed creature on his lap.

"They don't talk until they're at least one," Remus smirked, sitting gingerly on the arm of the couch, "I looked it up."

"Normal kids don't," Sirius tossed his hair back, gently holding Harry's chubby little wrists, "But Harry Potter is no ordinary baby, he's clearly very advanced for his age. Come on, Harry, say *Pad-foot* ..."

"Don't get your hopes up," Lily laughed, "James's mum told me *he* didn't speak until eighteen months."

"Oi," James yelled from his father's study, "I was an extremely thoughtful child, that's all."

"Oh yeah, what changed?" Sirius yelled back, grinning.

"You're hogging him, Padfoot!" Peter whined, reaching his arms out, "Come on, I haven't had a cuddle yet,"

"Not my fault he likes me best," Sirius replied, poking his tongue out at Peter, and then at Harry, puffing out his cheeks and bulging his eyes so that the baby giggled and burbled contentedly.

"I'll give you a cuddle, Pete," Remus teased.

"Lily, tell him!" Peter tutted, folding his arms crossly.

"Honestly! I've got one son and that's plenty," Lily laughed, getting up, "No fighting while mummy and daddy are out, ok boys?" She gave them all a very stern look.

"You've been spending too much time with Molly," Sirius said.

"Right, I'm ready," James came back through to the living room in his travelling cloak. Lily

already had hers on. She gave him a stoic smile,

“Let’s go then.”

A cold silence entered the room, and Remus looked at the floor, because he couldn’t bring himself to look at any of his friends, and especially not the baby.

Lily broke it,

“Oh, stop being so melodramatic, you lot. It’s a standard mission, we’ve done a hundred of these.” She went over to Sirius and bent to kiss Harry’s head - already sprouting a thatch of fine black hair. “Bye bye Harry, mummy and daddy love you so much. We’ll see you soon.”

James didn’t say goodbye - he had a wooden, muted expression that Remus had been seeing more and more of since his parents’ funeral.

“Are you sure you can’t tell us where--” Pete started.

“Sorry Wormy,” James held his hands up, “Moody’s orders. You know how it is.”

Peter nodded, shoulders slumping. Remus knew how he felt - it was difficult enough knowing that your friends were walking into danger. It was even harder not knowing exactly what they would be facing - as though they were disappearing out of reach.

“Come on,” Lily hurried her husband, pulling him from the room, “Back before morning, we hope!” She called from the hallway. And then the door slammed, and Harry burst into tears.

“Oh bugger,” Sirius said, over the screams, “Er... have him now if you like, Pete?”

It took hours to finally calm Harry down. He bawled as if his heart was broken, and wouldn’t settle until it was nearly midnight.

“Definitely couldn’t do this full time,” Sirius said, head in his hands as he slumped on the floor of the nursery.

“Jesus, I swear the kid’s possessed.” Remus whispered, rubbing his temples. He had a splitting headache.

“Shit, you should go to bed,” Sirius said, looking up at him. His usually immaculate silky black hair was in knots, and there was definitely still some milky baby sick stuck in there. Without a trace of irony, he frowned at Remus, “You must be exhausted,”

“Oh, I’m fine,” Remus shrugged - he tried not to wince as he felt every tendon in his back tug. Yesterday had been a full moon. “Actually I wasn’t going to stay... you know, I’ve got that work to do.”

“Oh, that.” Sirius nodded. His mouth was a straight line. He climbed to his feet, glancing at the red and gold cot one last time. Harry was sleeping, thank god. They both padded quietly out of the room, leaving it open just a crack.

On the landing, where the lights were still on, Sirius looked even worse - he had rings under his eyes, which were bloodshot. Remus touch his arm gently,

“*You* ought to go to bed.”

Sirius grabbed his arm, suddenly, eyes widening,

“Moony, don’t go.”

“Eh? I’m only going to the flat...”

“Please?” Sirius clutched at him, half mad with tiredness, “Just take the night off, just stay here with me?”

“Pete’s here...” Remus turned his head slightly. He could hear Peter snoring in the couch downstairs. Not much comfort, he supposed,

“But I want you,” Sirius said, desperately.

That struck Remus in an unusual way. To anyone else, it might have sounded whinging; childish. After all, Sirius was a grown man, and Remus had important work to do. But somehow it dislodged a feeling Remus hadn’t had for Sirius in a long time - a desire to protect him. To hold him close and tell him everything was going to be ok, and to be strong and reliable for the man he loved.

Amazed by this revelation, Remus did exactly that, hugging Sirius tightly and kissing his filthy hair,

“Ok then,” he whispered, “I’ll stay.”

After all, he thought, as Sirius trailed off to have a shower, relief evident in his posture; wouldn’t Sirius do the same for him?

* * *

Friday 21st November 1980

That time, Lily and James came back, as always; tired, a little harder, a little less bright, but otherwise perfectly ok. Remus always felt enormous relief when any of his friends returned safely, and each time swore to himself he would not take it for granted. But what does that mean, when you are young?

There had been deaths - deaths in the Order, deaths of people he knew - but no one really close. No one he truly loved. The Prewetts he had been fond of. Benjy Fenwick he had chatted to once or twice. But they weren’t close, and their losses didn’t affect him severely. Compared to others, Remus had been extremely lucky.

Of course, you never feel lucky, at the time. Good fortune is too often something that can only be recognised with hindsight.

Sirius turned twenty one in November. They didn’t have a party, but Hagrid baked a rather wonky - though very large and very delicious - cake, which they all ate at the Order safe house after the regular meeting. Someone took a few photos, but Remus forgot to try and track them down.

“It’s a big deal for muggles, twenty-one.” He commented as they climbed into bed that evening. “That’s when they come of age.”

“Why? Muggles can’t do magic.” Sirius frowned, yawning.

“No, I know, it’s just an old fashioned thing,” Remus tried to explain. “You get the key to your front door or something like that.”

“Daft muggles.” Sirius grumbled, his eyes already closing. “I feel old.”

“Well, you’re not,” Remus settled down beside him, “I’m the one going grey. Twenty-one is young. Really really young.”

Sirius sighed wearily.

“Doesn’t feel it.”

Remus knew exactly what he meant, but he didn’t like it. They were all of them caught in a confusing place between adolescence and adulthood - baby Harry had only exacerbated that. There was a sense of time running out; of needing to accomplish as much as possible as fast as possible. Peter’s crawling at his ministry job, always angling for a better position; James and Lily playing house and soldiers at the same time - Remus and his stupid drinking.

At least he had the research to do. That seemed to be going well - every now and then Dumbledore dropped by to see how he was getting on. And Remus would offload as much information as he could - with detail, because he knew Dumbledore liked detail. The old man would nod sagely, stroke his beard and sit quietly, ruminating. If he came to any conclusions, he didn’t tell Remus.

It felt good, though. Remus even felt himself warming to Dumbledore for the first time. He liked being useful. And then, just before the November full moon, Remus got his chance to be *really* useful.

As usual, there was a message from Moody. He was to apparate to some very specific coordinates on Friday 21st November, and meet Ferox there.

“Tell him no,” Sirius said, annoyed, “Bloody Moody, he knows that’s the night before the full moon! You shouldn’t be out running his errands when you’re not well.”

“Jesus, you make me sound like an invalid,” Remus rolled his eyes. “I’m sure there’s a good reason for it. I’ll be fine, don’t worry.”

“Send a patronus, if anything happens?” Sirius asked, solemnly. “I don’t care about protocol, just say you’ll let me know?”

“It will be *fine* .” Remus repeated.

He really did feel fine about it all. When the moon was waxing he often felt stronger than usual, and usually didn’t get bouts of nausea until a few hours before sunset.

It was good to get out of London; away from traffic and noise and crowds. It was good to get away from the Potters’ - from nappies and baby talk and crying and creamed spinach. At the agreed time, Remus apparated following the instructions he’d been given, and found himself on a windy clifftop, somewhere very cold and bleak.

The sea crashed and raged miles below, and the long grass whipped around his ankles. Remus breathed in, deeply, inhaling the salt, the soil, the sharp cold scent of the clouds. The wolf inside licked its lips, ears pricking to attention. Yes. Greyback had been here.

“Hello!” Ferox was a way off in the distance, a stick figure man waving at him. Remus raised a palm in greeting, bent forward into the wind and trudged to meet him.

“Hi,” he said, breathless as he approached, cold hands deep in his pockets, nose frozen. “Where are we?”

“Galloway,” Ferox said, cheerfully. He had a thick leather cloak on, with a hood, but his face was still ruddy from the harsh weather, and white fog blew from his lips as he spoke. “Pretty, eh?”

Remus wasn’t sure if he was being sarcastic or not, so he just gave a neutral smile. Privately he thought that yes, the landscape was beautiful, if forbidding.

“Greyback’s been here.” He said, wanting to get down to it.

“You know for sure?”

“One hundred percent.” Remus nodded. Ferox nodded too,

“Excellent, we were right, then. There was a report to the muggle police about a couple of tramps, man and a woman, looking shifty. Reckon they’ve been here, then?”

Remus considered, breathing in again,

“Yeah, but the scent’s old... maybe a day or so.”

“Right. Shall we take a walk, then? See if it gets a bit stronger?”

“Ok...” Remus wasn’t sure how he felt, being the Order’s bloodhound. But he wanted to find Greyback as much as anyone, so he did as he was told.

They strolled up and down the clifftop for a while, until Remus could be sure which way the trail led. As they headed downhill, away from the sea and down towards a small country road, he grew confident that Livia and Greyback had been there very recently, and began to walk faster. Ferox had no trouble keeping up, of course; he was as fit and healthy as he’d ever been.

“What will we do, if we find him?” Remus asked as they walked. He was careful not to bring Livia into it, because - ok, while she was definitely a killer, he couldn’t help feeling a bit more sympathetic towards her. After all, she was his sister, in a warped kind of way.

“Moody reckons they’re hunkered down somewhere for the full moon,” Ferox replied, “Based on my research, werewolves are weakest right after the moon, so we’ll wait until then.”

“Your research?” Remus gave him a funny look.

“Few books I’ve picked up - there’s not a lot to go on, beyond the NEWT level stuff.”

“Have you spoken to Madam Pomfrey? She looked after me for seven years, she knows loads,” Remus said, trying not to sound too impatient. “Or Marlene McKinnon? She’s been constructing her own case studies, to see if any advances can be made in lycanthropy treatment. Or, y’know. You could ask *me* . I might know a bit.”

Ferox laughed good naturedly,

“All right lad, all right, I see what you’re saying. It’s just that there isn’t always time to follow umpteen leads on a prick like Greyback. Got to move fast.”

Remus said nothing, because it would only have come out wrong. He really hated criticising Ferox, it felt so awkward and embarrassing. He’d looked up to him as an ideal vision of manhood, once, and he didn’t like tampering with that illusion too much. But *honestly* .The way he talked, you’d think Greyback was just some petty criminal, not a murderous creature and charismatic cult leader.

The scent had grown very strong, now, and as they crested the next hill, Remus could make out a

large grey-black structure in the distance. The ruins of an old castle - Scotland was littered with them of course. This one was a tower house, and looked like a big square prison squatting ominously over the remains of a boggy moat.

“There.” Remus said, stopping short. “That’s where he’ll be.”

Ferox clapped him on the shoulder.

“Good work, lad.”

* * *

Saturday 22nd November

Ferox didn’t want Remus present for the confrontation with Greyback. Remus did not give a toss. He knew where to go, and when, and nothing would change his mind.

“I’m coming too, then.” Sirius said, firmly, after he’d wheedled enough information out of Remus.

“No you’re bloody not.” Remus said.

“Am too. Sorry Moony, but there is absolutely no way I’m losing you to that monster a second time.”

“You didn’t lose me last time, you big drama queen, it was a mission,” Remus countered, “Anyway, I can’t put you in that sort of danger.”

“I’m in danger every day,” Sirius shrugged, “If it’s right after the full moon, you’ll need my help apparating.”

“I’ve done that before,” Remus dismissed, “It’s hard, but I’ll manage. Anyway, this isn’t a normal mission, you wouldn’t just be backup, you’d be leverage against me. He knows who you are. He knows what you mean to me.”

“He made you tell him?!”

“Sort of. I told you they can read minds.”

“That bastard. I’m definitely coming with you.”

Remus had forgotten how strongly Sirius felt about legilimency. Walpurga had used it as a punishment, and he would forever associate mindreading with black magic. Remus hadn’t raised the fact that this appeared to be a werewolf trait, and that, when pushed, he could do it too. Probably not a good idea to mention that just yet, he decided.

So Sirius got his way, of course, and Remus just hoped he would be able to protect him.

They went to the Lake District for the full moon; a place the marauders had enjoyed themselves before, a place with happy memories. James and Peter didn’t go. James hadn’t joined them for a full moon since Harry was born, and Remus understood that he didn’t want to be away from his family too often. Peter said something vague about working late, and honestly Remus was too busy worrying about the upcoming battle with Greyback to question it.

The wolf probably had a good time that night, but Remus didn’t remember much about it. It all got lost in the blood red haze of transformation, the choking and clawing and groaning as he twisted back into his human form.

“Urrrgh!”

“I’ve got you, Moony,” Sirius had him by the shoulders, pulling a cloak across his body. Remus forced his eyes open, knowing how little time there was.

“Wand,” he croaked, getting up. Sirius handed it to him. “We’ve got to go, now,” Remus said, leaning on Sirius for support while he pulled his clothes on, hands shaking and fumbling with the buttons on his shirt and trousers.

“We’re going, just take a breath,” Sirius said, his voice calm and firm. “Hold on to me, I’ll apparate us...”

Sirius was as good as his word; he didn’t try to dissuade Remus from going, or try to tell him what to do. He simply got them where they needed to be.

Ferox was there already.

“All right, lads,” he nodded, keeping his voice low. It was still quite dark under the grey Galloway sky, and the grasslands were cloaked in swaths of gauzy mist, the castle ruin rising from it black and foreboding. It was quiet, no birdsong, no noise at all. Like a place out of time.

“Have you seen anything?” Remus asked, desperately. He could smell them, the scent was very strong.

“Heard a bit of noise; must have been them turning back.” Ferox said. He gave Remus a look, “You ok, our kid? Looking a bit green about the gills.”

“Fine,” Remus swallowed, “Fine. We should go in now.”

“Right you are. Wands out.” Ferox straightened up and started forward, “Pity we couldn’t get ‘em when they were wolves, eh?” He said, with a smirk, “Those pelts fetch a few bob on the black market.”

Remus felt sick, the sweat on his back turned cold. Sirius reached for his hand in the dark and gave it a squeeze, then tossed his head and said sharply,

“Don’t say shit like that, it’s disgusting.”

Ferox glanced back at him, shocked, then at Remus. He frowned,

“Sorry lad, didn’t mean anything by it.”

They didn’t say another word as they approached the castle. Sirius and Ferox were trying to be quiet, but Remus knew they may as well have been a herd of elephants sneaking up on Livia and Greyback, whose senses were as sharp as his, even after the full moon. Still, they might be slower; weaker.

When they were up against the castle wall, Remus felt it. Greyback was waiting. The scent changed, and his head was filled with that dreadful growling voice,

Hello, cub... brought me breakfast, have you?

“He knows we’re here.” Remus whispered, frantically, “Be careful!”

Ferox touched his brow in a sort of salute, to show he understood. Then he rounded the corner and entered, Remus hurrying behind, and Sirius too. Ferox had his wand raised, and as he stepped

under the broken archway in the shadows of the ruin, he opened his mouth - he had planned to use the silver chain spell, to bind the werewolves and contain them long enough for the Aurors to take over - but it was too late.

Remus was only a split second behind Ferox, and saw the rock come down. He stiffened, then crumpled to the ground, blood oozing from the a cut at the crown of his head.

“No!” Remus cried, over Greyback’s laughter as the beast of a man stepped into the early morning light, his face full of glee. Livia sprung out next, and lunged at Sirius, grabbing his wand and knocking him to the ground.

“Ooooooh, who’s this then, brother? Pretty, pretty boy...” she crowed, sitting astride him, holding both of Sirius’s wrists over his head as he struggled. She looked thinner, but was obviously as strong as ever.

“Let him go!” Remus snarled, raising his wand, furious. Then he screamed in agony. Greyback grabbed his wand arm and twisted it so hard he felt the bone snap.

“Remus!” Sirius called out.

Remus was almost blind with pain, and Greyback laughed again, letting him go.

“Welcome back, cub,” he purred. “How I’ve missed you...”

“Fuck you.” Remus groaned, staring about for his wand, which he’d dropped somewhere.

“Now now,” Greyback chuckled, as Remus straightened up to face him, clutching his broken arm to his chest. “You should be on your hands and knees after what you did to me.”

“Kill him, father!” Livia cackled, “Kill the traitor Remus Lupin, just as he killed my brother Gaius! Then I can have the pretty one!”

Greyback grinned at her, fondly,

“She’s full of bright ideas, my beautiful girl.”

Remus took the opportunity to look over Greyback’s shoulder - Ferox was moving. Very slowly; he was obviously hurt, but Remus saw his fist tighten around his wand.

“Go on then!” Remus said to Greyback, gritting his teeth through the pain, “Kill me. Then what?”

“Then what?!” Greyback sneered, “Then I rip apart your little human pet, that’s what. Then I tear him limb from fucking limb - but not before I’ve had my fun with him...”

“You’re disgusting!” Remus shot back, stalling for time as Ferox’s eyes opened. May as well tell Greyback what he thought of him, while he had the chance, “You’re filthy! You’re nothing! You talk about freedom, but you don’t have the first clue what it is! You’re nothing but a bully! Voldemort’s lapdog!”

“Kill him!” Livia shrieked.

Greyback’s face had turned demonic with rage, yellow eyes glowing, and Remus really thought that would be the end. He scrunched his eyes shut and braced himself.

“What?! Argh!” Livia cried out again, and Remus heard a dog bark.

He opened his eyes to see Livia knocked backwards by Padfoot, who was growling - Remus had never seen him growl before - teeth bared, frothing at the mouth.

“Father!” Livia yelled, “Help m---”

And with a flash of purple light, Livia was silent. Her eyes went wide, a great black slash had cut her throat. She clutched at her neck to stem the gushing blood, but it was no good, it was too late.

Greyback gave a great roar of anguish, but Ferox was already on his feet, wand up, ready to cast the same curse again. Greyback was cornered.

“You’re a dead man.” He hissed at Ferox, and then, with one final snarl, he disappeared.

“Bugger!” Ferox grunted, stumbling forward, still poised to curse.

Sirius was Sirius again, and stood beside Livia, staring down at her. Remus went over too, feeling an uncomfortable mix of relief and genuine sorrow. Her grey fur cloak was matted with blood, which looked deep purple in the dim light. It was dreadful, but his first concern was for Sirius,

“Ok?” He asked, quietly.

Sirius nodded, still looking down. “You?”

“Think so.” His arm was throbbing, sending shooting pains up into his shoulder; but he knew that could be fixed. Livia could not. Ferox joined them, a hand pressed to his head where the rock had struck him.

“Merlin, what a mess.” He muttered. “At least we got the bitch.”

“Her name’s Livia.” Remus said, angrily.

He suddenly saw the scene as a passerby might. Three men standing over her tiny body.

She could have ripped each of their throats out the night before without stopping for breath. She was a force of nature; queen of the night; she was one of the strongest people he had ever met. She was one of the only people in the world who truly understood what it meant to be a wolf.

Her eyes were still open, staring blindly at the broad grey sky. Remus knelt beside her, and gently closed them.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is Too Much Too Young by The Specials

This fic has been nominated for a Marauder Medal by the Shrieking Shack Society! Last year, with all your lovely help, I won 'Best Work in Progress'. This year I'm lucky enough to be nominated for TWO awards!

- Best Characterisation of James

- Best Characterisation of Remus

I am so, so thrilled to be nominated, so thank you so much to whoever it was! I put a lot of effort into making sure all my characters are believable, three-dimensional

people, and this was such a lovely surprise :)

If you would like to vote for me to win either/both of these awards, you can do that here:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdGm5P_Ehq5Sjxdut6wJd71jZbh1EMQLREyDFhXlc

Make sure to check out the other fics nominated too!

Thanks once again, I have such an incredible readership and I'm really, really grateful!

The War: Winter 1980 & Spring 1981

Chapter Summary

The darkness... darkens.

Warnings for:

- Alcoholism
- Gore/blood
- Homophobia

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Well I love you baby,

I'm telling you right here.

But please don't make me decide baby

Between you and a bottle of beer!

Baby come on over;

Come on over to my side.

Well I may not live past twenty-one

But WOO!

What a way to die!

Sirius made Remus go straight to bed after the skirmish in Galloway. Ferox summoned Moody to the scene, and he excused them. Remus wanted to ask about Livia's body - were they planning to bury her, at least? He didn't know if Livia had had any wishes regarding her final resting place, but he assumed she'd prefer to be somewhere in nature; somewhere moonlight could reach her.

Marlene came over the flat on her way to work to sort out his broken arm.

"Thanks, Marls," he smiled weakly, "I can do dislocations no problem, but broken bones..."

"You really shouldn't be doing spells on yourself, Remus," she chided, "You know you can always contact me, if you need to."

"I know."

She left a sleeping draught and some more of her own ointment for pain relief, and ordered him to

stay in bed and do nothing useful or important for at least forty-eight hours.

It wasn't until the next day, when Remus woke up after two in the afternoon, that he was suddenly gripped with terror at the memory of Greyback's last words.

"He's going to kill Ferox!" He shouted, sitting up in bed.

Sirius came through from the living room, eyes wide with concern,

"What?"

"We need to find Greyback!" Remus said, climbing out of bed, limbs creaking, "He said he'd kill Ferox!"

"Moony, it's all taken care of," Sirius said, placing cool hands on Remus's shoulders, smoothing down his arms in a comforting gesture, "Ferox is going to move to a safe house, he'll up his security and be extra vigilant, don't *worry*."

"It won't be enough," Remus shook his head, batting away Sirius's attempts to calm him, "Moody and Ferox, they don't treat Greyback like a proper threat - look at what happened! He's more dangerous than they think, and now he's angry..."

"I'm sure Moody knows that, even if Ferox is a bit cavalier about it," Sirius said. He was being so diplomatic; so reasonable, it was infuriating. "How are you feeling? I'll put the kettle on, why don't you have a bath? You'll feel better..."

Remus did take a bath, because his muscles still hurt. He slathered on a bit of poultice afterwards, which at least meant he could straighten up fully. He refused to rest. All he wanted to do was check on Ferox - make sure he had the right security in place. After all, wasn't it Remus who'd been doing all the grunt work on protection charms? It was within his remit, surely.

In the end, Sirius gave in and summoned Moody through the fireplace. The Auror's grizzled head hovered in the flames like a hideous easter egg.

"All in hand, Lupin," he barked, "You can stand down."

"But Mad-Eye," Remus pleaded, on his knees in front of the hearth, "Greyback will find him, I know he will, he'll be able to follow the scent - if you just tell me where he is, then I can--"

"Classified information," Moody snapped. "Every precaution has been taken. You can trust that the Auror's office can cope with a lone werewolf."

Remus's temper rose, and he was about to retort, but Moody signed off. "No time for this, Lupin, it's been a busy week. Get some rest."

Remus groaned furiously, slamming his fist on the rug.

"See?" Sirius said, standing behind him, "Moody's got it all sorted."

"But I need to be sure," Remus said, climbing to his feet, "They don't understand, not really, not like..."

"Not like *you* do?"

"Exactly!"

“Remus,” Sirius’s voice hardened, out of nowhere, “You need to be careful with that kind of talk. I think... I think you ought to put a lid on the werewolf stuff, for a bit.”

“What?” Remus turned to look at him, blindsided. ““The werewolf stuff”!? What’s that supposed to mean? I *am* a werewolf.”

“I know,” Sirius bit his lip, “But you’re a wizard too, and you’re on *our* side. It just might be a good idea to focus on something else, you don’t want anyone in the order to get the wrong end of the stick...”

Remus gaped at Sirius as if he was a complete stranger.

“The wrong end of the stick...?”

“I’m not trying to upset you,” Sirius said, choosing his words carefully, “I’m only warning you - things are bad enough already, no one trusts anyone. Frank told me Dumbledore thinks there’s a spy in the Order, and if you keep bringing up how chummy you are with dark creatures then--”

“I am not ‘chummy’ with dark creatures!” Remus shouted. “How can you... unless you’re saying *I’m* a dark creature too?!”

“Of course I’m not!” Sirius returned, clearly offended, “It’s just... you *know* how much prejudice there is, and it’s not going to do you any favours to broadcast this weird connection you have with them. I *saw* Livia, I *saw* Greyback, you’re nothing like them. Don’t let people think you are.”

“Has somebody said something?” Remus asked, wondering where this was coming from, “Was it Danny, or--”

“No, it’s not... it’s... well, after you spent all that time with them, people have raised concerns, that’s all. You can understand that, can’t you?”

“No I can’t! I was only with the pack because Dumbledore ordered it! Just like I’ve always done everything Dumbledore’s told me to!”

“I know that...” Sirius looked away, as if embarrassed.

He tucked a strand of hair behind his ear. Remus knew that gesture. Sirius was nervous. He clenched his jaw.

“Do *you* trust me?” He asked, knowing his body language was aggressive, but not willing to temper it.

Sirius looked up at him, blue eyes filled with alarm.

“Of course I do! It’s just...” His eyes fell again, another swish of hair, “You’ve always been good at keeping secrets, Moony...”

Remus’s mouth dropped open. He clenched his fists, then unclenched them.

“Fine.” He said, coldly. “If that’s how you feel.”

He turned and walked out of the flat. Sirius didn’t try to stop him.

Remus went to the nearest corner shop first, and bought an extremely cheap and nasty bottle of gin. Then the problem was where to drink it. He didn’t want to look like an alkie, chugging hard spirits on the street in broad daylight. But then he didn’t really have anywhere else to go, either.

He considered looking for Grant, but he didn't know if he'd be working that day. Grant had moved back to London early in the spring, after too many times stuck on the late train back to Brighton. He was living in a bedsit somewhere north - but based on the telephone conversations they'd had, he rarely slept there. Grant had a string of paramours, and if he wasn't attending a lecture he could usually be found bed hopping - or at work, in the Sawyer's Arms pub.

"Variety is the spice of life," he teased Remus, "And I'm crap on my own. Can't hack the quiet."

Remus knew how that felt. A lot of the time it was the reason he drank. In the end, he decided he was too angry to be around anyone else, and went to hide in the park like a proper old waster. He ought to have gone to Grant's, he thought, once he was properly drunk; that would serve Sirius right.

He grieved for Livia, too; and made a silent toast. She'd been cruel, yes, and a murderer. But none of it had been her fault, really - not if you went back far enough. She'd been taken by Greyback before she was old enough to speak; when she was Harry's age, maybe. Livia had no choice but to become a killer, any more than Remus had a choice about his drinking.

He went home eventually, when it got too cold. He hadn't thought to bring a coat when he stormed out. Sirius was sitting on the couch, waiting for him, hands twisting anxiously in his lap. When Remus walked in, Sirius took one look at him, and - no doubt smelling the gin - shook his head, disappointed, and got up to make a pot of strong tea.

They didn't say much, and they never spoke about 'werewolf stuff' again.

* * *

Remus did not celebrate Christmas 1980.

In fact, he did not see any of his friends, or Sirius, from the full moon, which fell on 21st December, until January. He spent it hiding in Moody's cellar, with Danny McKinnon.

Ferox was dead.

Not just dead; destroyed; eviscerated. Ripped to pieces. According to the Daily Prophet, every wall of Ferox's house was splattered with blood. Moody said that the carpet was so saturated it squelched under their feet - the Aurors who'd arrived on the scene.

Greyback had made good on his promise, just as Remus had tried to warn them. But he couldn't bring himself to say 'I told you so'. He was too angry. Angrier still, when Moody told him he'd need to hide from the Ministry.

Ferox's murder spurred the wizarding public to demand a clampdown on werewolves. There were too many unregistered names; laws needed to be harsher; the register ought to be published. It was no longer safe - two days after Ferox's death hit the headlines, a known werewolf, Theodora Lupa, was attacked in her home. She was fully registered, and had spent the full moon locked up in the cells at the Ministry, but her innocence it meant nothing to the vengeful mob.

What was more, the death eaters appeared to be using the excuse to stir up more bias against magical creatures - it was understood that Voldemort himself was offering a reward for information on the locations of any 'half-breeds'.

So Remus was forced to hide.

"I'll miss Harry's first Christmas." He said stupidly, as he packed his suitcase.

“James and Lily will understand.” Sirius said. He was watching Remus from the bed, pale with terror. “We all just want you safe.”

“I know.” Remus nodded. There was nothing more to say.

They shared a chaste kiss goodbye. Things hadn’t been the same since Livia died, and news of Ferox’s hellish demise had turned Remus completely numb.

Moody was not much of a host. He blindfolded Remus and made him side-along, so he had no idea where he was. He saw none of the house - if it was a house - but the whole place reeked of black magic, so heavy and thick Remus thought he’d choke on it.

In the cellar, his blindfold was removed, and it was a sorry sight. Danny sat on one rickety put-up bed, and there was another pushed back against the opposite wall. There were no windows, and the walls were bare brick. Moody had put aside some provisions - he explained that there were so many protection charms and cloaking spells on the cellar door that it took hours to enter or to leave, so it was best they just sat tight until he told them the coast was clear.

Remus agreed, only because he knew that he could break the charms if he wanted.

There was a little toilet at the back with a sink - no shower, so they’d have to do their best with a flannel and a bar of soap. The food was all dried stuff that didn’t need too much preparation, and besides that there was nothing at all. Remus was just glad he’d had the foresight to bring a few books. Not to mention the bottle of firewhisky he’d stashed just in case.

“Hi.” Danny said, dully.

“Hello.” Remus nodded, as Moody locked the door at the top of the stairs.

“This is shit, isn’t it?”

“Yeah.” Remus went over and set his suitcase beside his bed, then sat on it. It sagged heavily, and squeaked. A faint smell of mildew rose from it, which put him in mind of the Shrieking Shack.

“Never spent a Christmas away from my family.” Danny said. “Even when I was touring.”

Remus nodded, glumly. He hadn’t had Christmas without Sirius in almost ten years.

“Couldn’t believe it when I heard about Leo Ferox. He was so... I dunno, I just really thought he’d make it through the war. Did you er... know him well?”

“He was my Care of Magical Creatures professor,” Remus offered. He wasn’t quite sure it had sunk it yet. He didn’t really feel very much, when he thought about Ferox; only a blurry sort of wistfulness.

“Oh wow,” Danny said, “Bet he was good at that.”

“Yeah, he was,” Remus gave a small smile, “Had loads of good stories.” He suddenly remembered Achilles, Ferox’s kneazle - what had happened to it? He thought about Greyback, in full wolf form, coming across the sleek silver animal, and for the first time, his eyes filled with tears.

Bugger. *Why did this have to happen now?* He thought, as his shoulders began to shake and he tried to get himself under control. *Why couldn’t I get emotional at the flat, when it was just Sirius?* Sirius wouldn’t care if he cried. It was no good. He covered his face with his hands and just waited for it to stop.

“Sorry, Remus,” Danny said, awkwardly. “I didn’t realise... he must have meant a lot to you.”

That made Remus cry harder, because of course Ferox had meant a lot. He was Remus’s first crush (not counting David Bowie, maybe), even if Remus hadn’t fully understood it at the time. He was one of the first adults Remus trusted, who made him feel like a person with value. Maybe they’d clashed a bit, as Remus had grown up, but no one was perfect.

“I’m sorry,” he coughed, wiping his eyes with his sleeve, “It’s been a bad year.”

“You can say that again.” Danny said. “Oh, Marls says hello. You should’ve seen her when Moody came for me, she was all set to come along too.”

“Really?” Remus smiled, sniffing, “That sounds like her.”

“Yeah, she said to give you a hug and a kiss, so tell her I did, ok?”

“Ok,” Remus laughed, feeling a bit more normal.

They pottered about a bit in their little living space. Remus tried not to think about the cell at St Edmund’s, or the Shrieking Shack, or the crypt in the forest - every cage he’d ever been forced into. He unpacked his clothes, then, finding nowhere to put them, re-packed them and slid his suitcase under the bed, leaving only his pyjamas out.

They had a little bit to eat - just some bread and cheese. Remus hadn’t eaten any meat since hearing about Ferox.

“What were you going to do for Christmas, if you weren’t stuck here?” Danny asked, over supper.

“Spend it at the Potters.” Remus replied, “With the new baby.”

“Oh yeah, of course, you’re all mates, aren’t you,” Danny nodded. “Marlene talks about you all like you’re celebrities.”

“Ha.” Remus grunted. “Maybe James and Lily. And Sirius.”

Danny cleared his throat awkwardly.

“Marls said you and he were...”

Remus just looked back at him, holding his gaze, allowing him to feel uncomfortable. Danny finally looked away, “Obviously that’s fine. I’m fine with Marlene and Yaz, aren’t I?”

Remus just shrugged,

“It’s a bit like being a werewolf,” he said, pulling the crust off his bread, “Everyone’s perfectly ‘fine’ with it, as long as you never bring it up.”

He had a few leftover cigarettes, and would have liked one after dinner, but for one thing, he didn’t want to share, and for another, there weren’t any windows and it seemed a bit rude to smoke the place out. *God*, he thought, *this is going to be agony*.

Things got even more awkward when it came time for bed. They were both yawning, and agreed it was quite late, and that they were tired. Remus began to take his socks off, and stood up to unbutton his trousers, when he realised Danny had not moved. He couldn’t see why he was so shy; didn’t quidditch players get undressed in front of each other all the time? James had been a borderline exhibitionist in the dorm room at Hogwarts. And surely Danny couldn’t be shy about

scars; Remus had heaps more than him.

“Close quarters.” Remus commented, hoping to put Danny more at ease.

Danny twisted his mouth, eyes flicking up and down Remus’s height.

“Er... Just so you know, it’s not like I’ve got a problem with it... with you. But *I* don’t swing that way.” Danny eyed him warily.

Remus rolled his eyes.

“Oh, poor me, whatever will I do?” He drawled, then turned his back and got into his pyjamas.

He climbed into bed and rolled onto his side, facing the wall, to prove that he couldn’t care less which way Danny ‘swung’. *Have you **seen** my boyfriend?!* He wanted to say. *As if I’d be interested in you, you big lump.*

Eventually, Danny undressed and got into bed too, then flicked out the light. Remus could hear his heart beating, and realised that Danny could probably hear his, too. They had even less privacy than they thought.

“Sorry, Remus.” Danny whispered, eventually, “I didn’t mean anything by it.”

That echoed something Ferox had said, and Remus felt the sadness return. He rolled onto his back, and spoke to the ceiling,

“It’s ok. Forgotten.”

Quiet for a while. Remus waited, hearing Danny poised on the cusp of a question.

“Did he always know?” Danny whispered. “Sirius?”

“Hmm?” Remus squinted over at him.

“You know. Did he always know you were a werewolf?”

“Oh. Yeah - mostly. He worked it out, when we were twelve or something.”

“And he still... I mean you still got together.”

“Yeah.”

“That’s good.” Danny said, sounding very earnest, “It’s nice to think... to think someone might be able to look past it, one day, you know?”

“It shouldn’t be something people have to look past in order to love you.” Remus said, fiercely, “It’s part of who you are.”

Danny didn’t reply.

Things got a bit easier between them, after the first night, but they kept each other at a distance anyway. Remus did a lot of reading. Danny sometimes exercised, doing press ups or jogging on the spot. It was annoying, but Remus couldn’t blame him.

On Christmas day, Remus couldn’t take it any more, and whipped out the bottle of fire whisky. They both got extremely drunk, and spent all of Boxing Day hungover. The room stank.

By the 27th, they were climbing the walls. Remus had finished his books - Danny had even read one of them, and they'd tried to have a conversation about it, but Danny knew so little about muggles that he hadn't really understood the plot.

"How much longer can it be?!" Danny said, exasperated. It was the 31st, the last day of the year. "What if we're still here for the full moon?!"

"That's weeks away." Remus replied. He was lying on his back on his bed, an arm slung over his face. Danny snored, and kept him up all night. "Anyway, we'd be fine, best place for us."

"What if we attack each other?"

"Well, I won't attack you if you don't attack me."

"You mean you can control it?!"

Remus sighed.

"Yeah. You can too. Not around humans, but other animals. Other wolves, it's fine. Why'd you think they live in packs?"

"I never really thought." Danny said. "What was it like? The pack?"

Remus bit his lip. Should he lie? Or did Danny deserve to know?

"It... wasn't as bad as I thought it would be." He said. That was the first time he'd admitted it. "Obviously Greyback was... but the rest of them. The ones who split off - they were ok. They were like family."

"Well." Danny said. "I've got a family already."

That was how it went, with Danny. He wanted to know things - he wanted to learn from Remus, but if he heard anything that made him uncomfortable it was right back to self-loathing.

Remus missed Sirius so much he swore he could feel it in his gut like hunger. He wanted so desperately to have someone he could really talk to; what a relief it would be to spend time with his best friend, to relax. *I'll apologise, he promised himself, I'll never get angry at him again. I'll kiss his feet and crawl over hot coals and broken glass if it'll get things back the way they were.*

He didn't want to end up like Danny.

They were a week into the new year by the time Mad Eye finally came for them. They both caught his scent at once, and sat up, keenly staring at the door. They'd almost run out of food by then, and Remus prayed this wasn't just a grocery delivery. He felt the charms being slowly undone, each layer peeling back. Finally, the door swung open, and the clunk of Moody's wooden leg on the first stair.

"All right, boys?" He called. "Ready to get back to work?"

* * *

Coming out of that cellar was like coming up for air. Remus felt as though all of his senses had been muted for weeks, and now everything was a riot of colour and noise and scent.

Moody wasn't joking about getting back to work. He took them straight to a new safehouse, where the rest of the order were gathering for a meeting. Remus could smell Sirius as soon as he got in

the door, and it made him so giddy with excitement that if he'd had a tail it would have been wagging. He ran his fingers quickly through his greasy hair, and thought about how awful he must look.

Moody led them down a corridor and - rather than going straight through to the kitchen, where they could hear everyone talking - veered into a small utility room, which had a muggle washing machine inside and a big pile of dirty towels in a basket.

"I'm bringing you through in a minute," he explained, "Ms McKinnon's been harassing me every day for the past two weeks to have you back, and Black's threatened me with every curse I've ever heard of," he smirked indulgently. "So you're out now, but I need you both to listen, right?"

"Right." They both nodded, blinking.

"The danger hasn't passed. You're still under threat. I can't have either of you leaving your homes without a disguise. I'd rather you didn't leave at all."

"But how can we help the Order if--"

"There's plenty you can do," Mad-Eye raised a hand of warning, fixing Remus with a hard look, "Research, communications, tracking spells, what have you. Unless you were enjoying your cosy little break in my cellar?"

They both shook their heads fiercely. No. Never.

"Right then." Moody nodded, business-like again. "Come on, then," he pushed the door open and they filed out, following him to the kitchen. It was crowded with people, most of whom Remus knew, and they all turned as soon as the door opened, fifty pairs of eyes, all wide with mistrust and worry.

"DANNY!" A blonde blur rushed past Moody and Remus and body-slammed Danny, winding him. He chuckled and hugged Marlene back,

"All right, sis?"

"Remus?" Sirius had stood up, and was crossing the room anxiously, climbing over chairs and squeezing past people who had to bend and twist out of the way, snatching back mugs of hot tea. He had to look down as he approached, so he didn't trip, and his hair fell in front of his face, swaths of black silk.

As he reached Remus, who was still standing half in the hallway, Sirius had to raise his arm and sweep his hair back, and Remus swore the room went completely silent for a moment, and the only sound was the frantic thudding of his own heart. He forgot to breathe, and gasped,

"Hi."

Sirius smiled a little, and stepped forward, a hand on Remus's shoulder to push him out of the room, into the dark hallway. Away from everyone else, Sirius slid his hand up Remus's neck, into his hair, and kissed him on the lips - so beautifully.

* * *

Spring 1981

The honeymoon period after Remus's hiding lasted well into February. Both of them were so

apologetic, and so grateful to be together again, that for a while everything was wonderful - they were like teenagers again. Especially because Remus wasn't supposed to leave the flat, which meant that there really wasn't a lot else to do.

Sirius popped over to check on James and Lily and the baby every now and then, and he still had missions to go on - but he always rushed back to Remus as soon as he could. They spent days and evenings lounging in bed together, eating beans on toast and smoking and playing records. It was like living on a private island - they'd even had to cut off the floo connection for safety's sake.

Luckily, Remus was allowed to keep the telephone, his lifeline, and the others came over when they could. Mary visited on her way back from work at least twice a week, to avoid her noisy family.

"It's bliss, over here," she smiled, sinking into the couch and closing her eyes. "If you had a telly I'd never leave."

"Ha, I'm working on it, trust me." Remus replied. "Is it really bad at yours? Do you want to stay over a few nights?"

"Nah," she opened her eyes, "I want to be with my family. They keep me normal. It's just... you know, they don't know anything about the war - I don't *want* them to know, but... it's so hard."

"Sorry, love." Remus said, wistfully. "Want a drink?"

Mary gave him one of her long, gentle looks, tilting her head.

"No, Remus," she touched his knee, "It's never a good idea to drink when you feel like this. It doesn't make things better, does it?"

Remus just shrugged. He didn't see what the big deal was. Mary just smiled again, and took a sip of her tea, and continued as if nothing had happened.

"Anyway, I can always pop to Darren's if I need a break from the kids."

"Darren? That kid you were going out with in fourth year?"

"Well remembered," she laughed, "Yeah, he still lives across the hall. I go over sometimes, we're friends."

"Just friends?" Remus raised an eyebrow. Mary looked down, suddenly sad.

"Yeah. That's all it can be, right now. He's a muggle, I'm in the Order... I'm already putting my family at so much risk, I couldn't bear if..."

She shook her head, her face resolute. "Sorry! I'm supposed to be here keeping you company, not bringing you down!"

She still didn't want to drink after that, but they had a nice long chat anyway. In hindsight, Remus would be glad that Mary was there that night, and that she stopped him getting drunk. Because that was the night James got hurt.

Song at the beginning is What a Way to Die by The Pleasure Seekers.

If you don't hate me for all these miserable war chapters, you might consider voting for me in the Shrieking Shack Society's Marauder Medals. I am nominated for best characterisation of James and best characterisation of Remus.

Vote

here:https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdGm5P_Ehq5Sjxdut6wJd71jZbh1EMQLREyDI

Thanks again to everyone reading and commenting! Hang in there!

The War: Triage

Chapter Summary

No warnings, but emotions running very high.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Police and thieves in the streets (oh yeah)

Scaring the nation with their guns and ammunition,

Police and thieves in the street (oh yeah)

Fighting the nation with their guns and ammunition.

From genesis to revelation,

The next generation will be, hear me

From genesis to revelation,

The next generation will be, hear me,

And all the crowd come in, day by day

And no one stops it in anyway

All the peacemaker, turn war officer

Hear what I say.

While Mary and Remus sat on the cosy couch in the little Soho flat, curtains drawn over the dark windows, fireplace crackling, Sirius, Lily and James were in mortal peril.

This passed for a normal Friday night, in those days. By now everyone had developed a fatalistic attitude to life, and a kind of gallows humour. “See you, later,” Sirius would say, leaving the house, “If I make it.”

“Meet you at home,” James would tell Lily, “If it’s still there!”

It helped everyone get through it, at the time - after all, if you said the worst thing out loud, it couldn't hurt as much, could it? The thought tortured Remus for a long time after the war was over.

They were only supposed to be on a routine patrol - in Diagon Alley, which made Remus feel better because it was so close by. There were three of them, and they would be checking in with a senior Order member at the start and finish, so it should have been business as usual. In fact, Mary was about to leave Remus and go home for the night - when there was a hammering on the door.

They both jumped, and Mary let out a strange squeak of terror. Then the door began to open, and they both stood, wands raised, Remus covering as much of Mary as he could.

“Help!” A muffled voice came, and Sirius and Lily pushed their way into the flat, James’s limp form sagging between them, an arm over each of their shoulders.

“Christ!” Remus started forward to help, and between them all they got him onto the couch. “What happened?!”

“Remus,” Mary choked, her wand still raised, hand trembling, “The questions...”

“Right, fuck, ok, um...” His mind was racing, he couldn’t stop staring at James’s face, pallid and waxy, gleaming with sweat. He looked at Lily, “What did... um.. Who...?”

“Lily, who was your first kiss?” Mary stepped in, quickly.

“Dirk Cresswell.” Lily said, promptly. Sirius and Remus both gave her a funny look, but there was no time to make a fuss.

“Sirius,” Mary said, redirecting her wand, “Same question.”

“I don’t know!” Sirius said, exasperated, pulling away James’s robes - there wasn’t any blood, but James’s eyes were closed, the lids deep purple, “One of you go and get McKinnon!”

“What do you mean you don’t know?!” Mary rounded on him, “Answer the bloody question, Black!”

“I can’t, I really don’t know! It was some muggle girl in a cinema! Moony, tell her!”

“He’s telling the truth,” Remus said, his throat dry, “He is, we got into a fight over it. I punched him.”

“Punched you back,” Sirius muttered, scanning James with his wand. “Get Marlene?! Please!”

“I’ll do it,” Mary said, backing out of the room, quickly. The door slammed and they heard a *CRACK* as she disappeared from the landing.

Lily came hurrying in from the bathroom, clutching a damp flannel. She knelt beside James and pressed it to his forehead,

“Don’t you dare, Potter,” she whispered feverishly into his ear, “Don’t you bloody dare...”

“What happened?” Remus grabbed Sirius’s shoulder, “An attack?”

“Yeah,” Sirius nodded, sweating and shaking. Remus wished he would sit down, but he knew there was no point saying so, “Ambush. Six death eaters. Someone must have known we’d be there, someone must have *told*...”

“Sirius!” Lily shrieked, “Look!”

She had loosened James’s shirt, and revealed long green coloured streaks, like tree branches

stretching out beneath his skin. His breathing was shallow.

“Oh fuck,” Sirius crumbled, falling to his knees beside Lily, “Did you hear what the curse was?”

Lily shook her head, tears streaking down her face. James’s breathing grew laboured, rasping in his throat, and he was limp as a rag doll.

Remus’s heart began to rattle in his chest, his vision swam and his knees went weak. Not James! He was the very best of them. He was the one who had to make it, no matter what. How could there be a world without James Potter? You might as well picture a world without kindness, or laughter, or mischief.

“Firewhisky.” Remus said, suddenly, “I’ve got a bottle somewhere.”

“Not *now*, Moony!” Sirius snapped, his face jagged as a demon’s. Remus recoiled, hurt,

“I meant for Prongs! It might help the shock.”

“Try it!” Lily wailed, lifting the cold flannel on James’s forehead to feel his skin. Remus could tell from a metre away that he had a temperature. “Try anything!”

Remus ran, and while he was in the kitchen looking for a wooden spoon (he’d heard that metal was bad for someone having a fit - they could hurt their teeth. James wasn’t seizing, but better to be safe), Mary returned with Marlene. The whole atmosphere changed.

“Out of my way, please!” Marlene’s crystal clear voice rang out, its inherent common sense authority restoring order at once.

Relieved, Remus came through clutching the firewhisky. Lily was crying harder now, standing back to let Marlene work. Sirius had his arms around her, eyes never leaving James’s face, which was starting to turn a deathly shade of grey.

“Marls,” Sirius said urgently, “Please... please...”

“I’m doing my best, Black!” Marlene barked, turning to open her bag. Remus caught the flushed look of terror in her face, the shimmer of tears in her eyes. This was bad.

It was as if they were all holding their breath. Mary was still in her coat, pressed against the door.

“Is there someone else I can get?” She asked, her voice hoarse. “Tell me, I’ll go anywhere.”

“I don’t know,” Marlene said trembling. “There’s no one safe at St Mungo’s, and I don’t know if anyone else in the Order is... Emmeline, maybe, but she’s in Hungary or somewhere...”

“You can do it though, Marls?” Lily said, desperately, “You can heal him?”

“I don’t know, I... What was the curse?”

“We don’t know,” Sirius said, “It was wordless.”

“What about a bezoar?” Mary asked.

“That’s for poison,” Sirius shot back. “He was cursed.”

“Yeah, but still, isn’t it worth a try?”

"I don't have one anyway!" Marlene let out a sob. She was really crying, now, her hands hovering over James's body, shaking.

His breathing was coming slower and slower, Remus could still hear his heart beating, but that was getting weaker; a long syrupy 'thwump'. They had to *do* something.

"Can you describe the curse?" He asked, brain ticking.

"It was wordless!" Sirius repeated, impatiently.

"No, but could you *describe* it?" Remus persisted, firmly. "A light? Colour? A smell?"

"I'm not like you, Remus, I'm not..." Sirius ran his fingers through his hair, frowning,

"Blue." Lily said, sniffing, "There was a blue light, wasn't there Sirius?"

"Yeah!" He nodded, lighting up, "It was blue, and kind of... Jagged? Short, like a dart."

"Yes," Lily wiped her eyes, looking at Remus as if he was her saviour, "It was like arrows being fired at us; blue arrows."

"Ok," Remus nodded, as if he knew exactly what he was doing. He had never heard of a curse that did that. "Ok, so... blue... er..."

"Remus!" Mary cried, "Blue, isn't that explosive charms?"

"Yeah," he jumped on it, eagerly, then frowned, "But he hasn't..." He looked down at James. He was completely intact - just incredibly weak.

"Maybe they combined it with something?" Lily said, straightening up, folding her arms across her body and putting on her war face. "Magical alchemy, you boys do that all the time."

"Or it could have been a mistake," Sirius said, leaning in, his eyes finally focussing properly, "That happens all the time too."

"Yeah!" Remus agreed, "The death eater might have just really wanted to use a lot of force, that can come out explosive sometimes... oh! Did you have shield charms up?"

"We did," Lily nodded, the lines in her forehead deepening, "But James - his had just dropped, just for a split second, he was trying to..." she looked down.

"He was trying to protect me." Sirius said, very low. "Last thing he did was disarm that fucking Crouch kid, he was about to get me with an unforgivable."

Remus blinked with shock, and then shoved that feeling down, down as far as it would go, because he needed to deal with *James* now.

"Ok," he swallowed. "Ok, so what if whoever hit James was just a bit slow? Tried to get through the shield charm just the second it went down."

"That makes sense," Lily said, her face bright with tears and sweat and hope, "That accounts for the short bursts!"

"Ok, great!" Remus looked down at Marlene, who was staring at him eyes as big as saucers.

"What do I do, Remus?" She said, her voice very small - as if they were back in the library at

Hogwarts and she didn't understand a transfiguration principle.

"I... how would that hit him?" Remus asked, agitated - *he* didn't know what to do! *She* was the one with two years training as a Healer! "What would it do?! Think!"

"I'm trying!" Marlene said, still shaking.

Remus wanted to take her by the shoulders and *really* shake her - she had to get herself together! This was James! He had a family, and a baby, and Sirius needed him, and *Remus* needed him, they all did! Marlene just kept staring at them all, frozen.

"Marls," Mary came over, quickly, squatting down next to her friend. She did take Marlene by the shoulders - but she didn't shake her. She hugged her, and stroked her hair. "Sweetheart," she whispered into the silent room, "You can do this. You're the cleverest person I know. If anyone knows what to do, it's you. Ok?"

Marlene shut her eyes for a moment, and breathed in, deeply. She opened them and nodded,

"Right." She said, turning back to James. "It would have been hard, right in the chest... it would have... yes! Yes, it *does* make sense!"

She began to mutter to herself, and then moved her wand, a warm, soft lilac glow emanating from the point, pooling over James' prone body, sinking in slowly, like foam.

They all held their breath once more, while Marlene worked. Sirius was holding Lily's hand, and Remus could see her knuckles turn white as she gripped him back. Mary stayed by Marlene's side, kneeling on the rug beside the couch, her head bent as if praying.

Remus just clutched his bottle of whisky and felt as though the world was falling out from under him. There was nothing to do but watch and wait, listen to Marlene's steady muttering, and try to keep perspective.

The magic she was using had a sweet, fresh scent, like cut grass, or budding leaves. The smell of springtime, of regeneration. That was a good sign, Remus thought. He wished he had learnt more from the werewolves - their healing techniques had been flawless. But maybe that only worked on other werewolves?

James's breathing was getting steadier, his heart rate a bit stronger. *Woosh - woosh - woosh* - Remus could hear his blood pumping faster already.

"It's working!" He said, going a bit closer to hear better. "You're doing it, Marlene!"

"Oh thank you," Lily said, covering her eyes with her hands, "Thank you, thank you..."

Marlene stopped muttering and felt James's pulse. She sighed with relief and nodded,

"Stable." She said. Then, looking up, "Might as well give him a bit of that whisky, Remus."

After they'd got a bit of that down him, Marlene gave James a strengthening potion. He was getting a bit of colour back, by then, and his chest was rising and falling evenly. They were out of the woods. Still, Marlene didn't want him moved, not until he'd regained consciousness.

"He can stay here," Remus said, "Of course he can. It's safe, isn't it, Padfoot?"

Sirius was watching Remus, across the room. He was thinking, Remus could tell - he had his

problem-face on. For some reason, it made Remus go cold. "Padfoot?"

"Yeah..." Sirius said, slowly, "But we thought Diagon Alley was safe enough."

"Well, he's here now," Lily said, getting up from James's side. "He's staying. I have to go home - Peter's looking after Harry, he must be so worried! I'll be right back..."

"Someone should go and get Dumbledore." Sirius said, abruptly.

"What for?" Mary asked.

"Just... he ought to know we were attacked. He ought to know somebody told the death eaters where we'd be."

"Sirius!" Mary stared at him, her mouth open, "Are you saying... someone in the Order?!"

Sirius nodded. He didn't look at Remus again.

"I'll go!" Remus offered.

"No!" Sirius said. "You can't, you... you need to stay here. It's not safe for werewolves."

"It doesn't seem to be safe for anyone!" Marlene retorted, standing up, wiping her forehead. "You go, Sirius, since it's so important. Remus, Mary and I can stay and look after James."

Sirius looked at James, and then at Remus - not his face, though, just his general direction.

"Ok," he said. "I'll be really quick." And headed out the door.

The three women looked at Remus awkwardly. Lily came over to squeeze his shoulder, and said gently,

"He's just upset, love. He blames himself for what happened - James was trying to save him when he got hit. Don't take it personally, eh?"

"I know," Remus raised his chin, manfully, squashing down all of the bitter, rotten emotions, "It's fine. We're all in shock. It's fine."

"I've got to go," Lily said again, "Harry."

"I'll come with you," Mary said, "We should go everywhere in pairs. That's what Moody would say."

They both left, and Remus tried not to think about the fact that Sirius had vanished into the night completely alone.

Marlene had collected herself by now, and was bustling about making James comfortable,

"I should have told Lily to bring him some pyjamas... maybe she will anyway," she said, "Have you got a pillow and some blankets for him, Remus?"

"Yeah, 'course." Remus nodded, hurrying to the bedroom, coming back with five blankets and two pillows (they were the only pillows they had, actually; he'd taken them right off the bed).

Marlene was checking James's pulse again when he came back.

“Is he ok?!”

“Yes,” Marlene nodded, “Still steady. I was just checking...”

They made up a bed on the couch around him. Remus took his shoes off, but they decided to wait until Lily was back to undress him. He looked as though he was just sleeping. Remus smiled,

“I’ve never heard James be so quiet for so long,” he commented, hoping to lighten the mood a bit.

“Ha.” Marlene said, then burst into tears again.

“Hey hey hey!” Remus pulled her to him, “It’s over now! Please don’t cry...”

“I’m - sorry - I’m - just - so - scared -” Marlene sobbed, choking on every breath, “I let - everyone - down!”

“No you didn’t!” Remus felt horribly guilt for shouting at her, “You did an amazing job!”

“Only - because - you lot - helped...”

“Well, obviously,” he kissed the top of her head, “That’s what friends are for.”

* * *

Lily and Mary returned first. Lily cradling Harry in her arms - who was sleeping, mercifully. She went straight to James’s side once more.

“I brought some of Effie’s potions,” She said, harried, “Have a look, Marlene, there might be something useful...”

“I don’t want to dose him up too much,” Marlene said, carefully. “Rest and observation is the best thing now, I promise.” She had washed her face and had a nip of whisky, and was considerably calmer now.

“Did you see Wormtail?” Remus asked.

“Yeah,” Mary said, taking Harry from Lily, so that she could focus on James. “He was really upset - he wanted to go home and check on his mum. Can’t blame him.”

“No, of course.” Remus agreed. He’d want his mother, too, if he had one.

He made a strong pot of tea, and everyone took a cup, but nobody drank any. Marlene and Lily poured over James, undressing him and tucking him into bed, plumping up his pillow, while Mary gently rocked Harry in her arms. Remus watched the three of them - like saintly maidens in a church altarpiece - and felt completely useless.

“Could we move him to the bed?” He said, annoyed he’d only just thought of it, “Then you can sleep next to him, Lily.”

“Better not for now,” Marlene advised.

“Right, then I’ll make you up a bed here...” he tried to remember some transfiguration charms - though conjuring furniture was usually something Sirius was better at.

“Don’t worry, Remus, I’m not going to sleep.” Lily smiled, tiredly.

"I don't think any of us will." Mary said. "I phoned mum. All right if I stay here too, love?"

"Of course." He nodded. And of course Marlene wouldn't be going anywhere until she was certain James was going to make a full recovery.

In the end, they agreed they'd sleep in shifts, and take the bed two at a time. None of them wanted to go first, of course, and they all settled in for a very long night. Remus leaned against the mantelpiece, listening to James's heart beating across the room. He kept picturing his friend suddenly sitting up, grinning at them all; *Alright you lot? Bloody hell, who died?!*

Finally, Sirius returned with Dumbledore, and any peace they had managed to reclaim was shattered.

"I need to know everything." The old headmaster said, his face severe, eyes burning like the blue centre of a flame.

Sirius and Lily began talking. They explained how everything had been routine - standard; boring, if anything. They'd done a sweep of Diagon Alley, even Knockturn Alley, and found everything perfectly safe and secure.

Then they'd left, via the Leaky Cauldron exit, and had decided to walk to the check-in point, as it was a nice evening, and not too far. They were supposed to meet Dorcas Meadows in a muggle café on Tottenham Court Road - but they'd been ambushed before reaching it.

"You couldn't have been followed?" Dumbledore asked, looking at them both. They shook their heads.

"We made sure," Lily said. "They weren't behind us, they were ahead - they were *waiting* for us."

"Shit, someone ought to tell Dorcas..." Sirius said, suddenly, "After James got... we had to get out fast, there wasn't time."

"It would not have mattered," Dumbledore waved a hand, "Dorcas Meadows is dead."

The room fell silent. Harry woke up and started to cry. Lily took him from Mary at once, clutching her son close to her chest.

Sirius spoke first.

"I'm right, aren't I?" He looked Dumbledore directly in the face, "There's a spy in the Order."

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Police & Thieves' by The Clash.

Fair warning - The next two chapters will cover June - November 1981.

The War: Summer 1981

Chapter Summary

This chapter includes the death of a key character.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*Once I had a love and it was a gas,
Soon turned out; had a heart of glass.
Seemed like the real thing, only to find,
Much of mistrust, love's gone behind.*

*Once I had a love and it was divine,
Soon found out I was losin' my mind
It seemed like the real thing but I was so blind,
Much of mistrust, love's gone behind.*

James recovered - slowly. He was moved back to the Potter house the next day (waking up groggy, unable to say very much, quickly falling back to sleep), but Dumbledore declared this a temporary solution. He told Lily to prepare to leave at a moment's notice.

After months of being regarded as junior members of the Order, the marauders and their friends suddenly had all eyes on them.

At the next Order meeting, which James insisted on attending despite his weakened state, there were definitely whispers.

Seven kids - three of them wealthy heirs to pureblood houses, two muggle born, a werewolf, a novice Healer - what made them so special? Could they be trusted? They had survived the war so far, against all the odds. Were they just lucky, or was there something more to it? Who *were* these kids, who had escaped six death eaters and somehow reversed an almost incomprehensible curse?

They had gathered in a small cottage, somewhere in the Peak District. It was a small living room, but the Order was small by then.

At the end of the regular meeting - which had really become more of a remembrance service for people they'd lost since the last time they'd met - Dumbledore asked Lily and James to stay behind while everyone else headed home. In turn, James asked Remus, Sirius and Peter to stay.

“Are you sure?” Sirius whispered, urgently, “After everything that’s happened...?”

“--After everything that’s happened I want my best friends nearby.” James replied. Remus felt a swell of pride at that - to James, good sportsmanship extended to every element of his life. To mistrust the people he loved would be highly dishonourable.

Sirius folded his arms, but didn’t argue.

James sat in a chintz armchair, his back straight, his face set. He looked perfectly healthy, unless you really knew him. His cheeks were more hollow, his skin paler, and - though everyone was pretending they hadn’t noticed - his jet black hair now had a few threads of grey. Lily had brought a blanket to lay over his lap, but he kept pushing it off, irritably.

“I’m fine,” he muttered under his breath. “Leave me be!”

“There’s no need to be like that!” Lily hissed back. She was looking a lot paler, too, her tired face lined with worry. Remus had never seen Lily and James snap at each other before. It felt horrible.

Harry was fussing, flailing his arms and making a face. Lily was taking no chances now - they went everywhere as a family, or nowhere at all.

“Shh,” she jiggled him on her hip, “Quiet now, Mummy and Daddy are busy...”

“Give him here,” Sirius held out his arms, “We’ll have a little play, won’t we Harry?” He lifted the little boy up, and Harry squirmed and giggled delightedly.

He wasn’t saying many words yet - ‘Da-da’, ‘Ma-ma’, ‘No!’ and, for some reason, ‘bike!’ were about the extent of it. But he knew his godfather. Remus wondered if it was the smell of old leather. His own experiences with Harry were hit and miss. They got on ok until the kid started crying - and Remus was no good at pretend play, like Sirius was.

The pair settled down on the living room floor, Sirius with his legs splayed out, Harry between them. Sirius pulled a little toy train out of one of his jacket pockets, and Harry began pushing it across the bumpy rug, burbling happily to himself. Sirius beamed at him. He was so good with children. Remus felt a weird sense of dissonance - did Sirius want kids of his own, one day? They’d never discussed it, and Remus had never had the slightest interest. He didn’t feel qualified to be a parent, and he wasn’t sure he ever would.

Maybe it was that, then. Maybe that was why Sirius was acting so strangely?

Remus’s private worries were interrupted then, by Dumbledore, who cleared his throat, commanding everyone’s attention.

“We have reason to believe,” he said, quite calmly, “That Voldemort’s focus has changed.”

Everyone looked up, even Sirius.

“We’ve received some information that the Dark Lord has become aware of a prophecy that was made early last year, which seemed to refer directly to him.”

“A prophecy?” Peter leaned forward, “What prophecy? What did it say?”

“It is better that we share only the most pertinent details,” Dumbledore said sharply, “Particularly in mixed company.”

Everyone looked around the room. Remus felt a bit queasy - he did not consider the people congregated to be 'mixed company'. They were his friends; his comrades, and the people he trusted with his life. He tried to catch Sirius's eye, hoping for some reassurance, but Sirius quickly looked away.

"So he's changed his focus," James said, breaking the discomforting quiet, "What does he want now?"

"In short, Mr Potter," Dumbledore said, directly, "He wants you. Or rather, your son."

Lily let out a horrible gasp, her hand flying to her mouth. James gripped the arms of his chair. Peter had an odd sort of nervous spasm. Sirius gathered Harry up and stood at once, "*What?!* "

"I am sorry," Dumbledore said, steadily, "But I have it on very good authority--"

"*Who's* authority?" Lily asked, sounding strangled.

"That I cannot say. I will not place anyone else in danger."

"There's a spy, then," Peter said, wringing his hands anxiously, "On their side, I mean?"

"I cannot say." Dumbledore repeated.

"Well you'd better say *something* useful!" James returned, almost shouting, "What do you mean my son?! How can Voldemort even *know* about Harry?!"

"We can't trust anybody." Sirius said, quietly.

James turned to look at him, a look of pure disbelief. Inwardly Remus was relieved. James trusted his friends - of course he did. Sirius was being paranoid.

"But why Harry?!" Lily asked, shrilly.

"Voldemort believes that Harry will one day grow up to defeat him."

"Is that what the prophecy said?"

Dumbledore inclined his head slightly, as if considering this.

"It is what Voldemort believes." He said, eventually. "And that is the same thing."

"You'll have to hide," Sirius said, talking directly to James now, "All three of you. There have to be more charms - stronger magic we haven't tried yet - we'll send you to bloody Timbuktu if we have to!"

"Padfoot," James said, raising a hand, "Calm down."

"I will not!" Sirius shouted, red in the face. For a weird split-second, Remus didn't recognise him at all.

Harry started crying, reaching for his mother. Lily took him and cuddled him close, kissing his fine black hair and whispering soothing nonsense.

"Sirius is right," Dumbledore said, still infuriatingly calm, "You will have to hide. Plans are already in motion."

“How soon can we go?” James asked. “Today?”

“Soon.” Dumbledore said. “I will come for you.”

“Ok.” James nodded. “Ok. Right. Good.”

“You will all remain vigilant, I trust,” Dumbledore continued, beginning his closing address. He looked at each of them, as if to impress the gravity of the situation. When he met Remus’s eyes, Remus made sure to stare back, and tried to transmit an aura of reliability and strength. Dumbledore gave the briefest of nods, before moving on to Peter.

“And none of you will share this information with anyone outside of this room.”

They all nodded. Remus’s head was spinning - if Lily and James went into hiding, what did that mean? Would they be stuck in Moody’s cellar, like he’d been? He dearly hoped not, he wouldn’t wish that on anybody, least of all his best friends and their baby.

Once Dumbledore had left, they walked out of the cottage, into the thick amber evening sunlight, and looked at each other again. Harry had fallen asleep by now, nestled in Lily’s robes, one chubby hand fisting her long red plait.

“You’d better all come over for dinner,” James said, with a strained smile. “Just in case we don’t get another chance.”

A lump developed in Remus’s throat, and lodged there for the rest of the night.

Still, they had a nice time. Gully the house elf prepared a full Sunday roast at short notice - glorious roast beef, golden roast potatoes and fluffy yorkshire pudding, two kinds of stuffing, mouth-watering rich dark gravy, carrots, parsnips, peas, broccoli... Remus hadn’t eaten on that scale since Hogwarts.

Before they began, James raised his glass to toast,

“To our friends,” he said, shooting a slightly pointed glance at Sirius, “Who’ve always been there for us, through thick and thin - Lily, Harry and I love you all so much.”

Remus had to excuse himself after draining his glass. He spent a few minutes composing himself in the downstairs loo. When he came out, and returned to the table, Sirius was watching him again, his eyes narrow, his mouth an inscrutable straight line.

* * *

Wednesday 10th June 1981

Two days later, Sirius disappeared in the night. He must have crept away deliberately, because Remus didn’t even realise until he woke up the next morning, and rolled into the cold empty pillow. He sat up, confused.

“Sirius?” He called to the rest of the flat. It was empty.

He got up and went to the living room, and checked the kitchen - sometimes they left each other notes. There was nothing. But Sirius’s shoes were gone, and the keys to the bike, so he must have left of his own free will, at least.

Remus sat at the kitchen table and waited, chain smoking. He wanted to contact someone, but there

wasn't anyone who he was sure he could trust - Sirius's conspiracy theorising was starting to get to him.

Finally, the front door clicked open, and Sirius's familiar footfall could be heard entering the flat. Remus almost got up and ran to meet him - but he had been treating Sirius with kid gloves ever since James's attack.

"Moony?"

"In here."

"Oh, hello," Sirius stood in the kitchen doorway. He looked flushed - he must have been on the bike. "All right?"

"Where have you been? I was worried!"

"Sorry." He pulled a face and came to sit down at the table too. Remus watched him. He seemed happy. His hair smelled of the countryside, and he was sweating a bit through his black t-shirt - it was gearing up to be a very warm summer. He picked up the cigarette packet, took one out with his teeth and snapped his fingers to light it.

Remus waited patiently.

"It happened," Sirius said, finally, his face shining strangely, pearlescent in the weak light of morning. "They're hidden."

"Lily and James?" Remus squinted, scratching his head, "How?"

"Dumbledore sorted it all."

Why didn't you take me with you? Remus wanted to ask, before scolding himself for having such a selfish thought. That wasn't the important bit. "Is it safe? I gave James a whole scroll of security charms to use, did he--"

"They won't need any of that," Sirius waved a hand. He seemed weirdly triumphant, as if he had just bested Remus at a game of chess. "Dumbledore came up with something better."

"What?"

"The fidelius charm."

"The..." Remus frowned. He vaguely remembered having read about that... something to do with implanting a secret into another person. It was powerful stuff, he knew that much. No one would be able to break it, except the secret keeper themselves. "Well, that'll do it, I suppose." He said. "But wouldn't they need someone to put the secret *in* ?... is it Dumbledore?"

"He volunteered," Sirius said. "But in the end, we thought it was better if it was one of us."

"One of us..?" It dawned on Remus all of a sudden, as if Sirius had dumped a bucket of ice over his head. "No." Remus said, shaking his head.

Sirius was staring at him intensely, his eyes dark blue and more serious than they had ever been. Remus wanted to hit him. Shake him. Wring his neck. Anything to get some sense in his stupid thick skull. "*No* ." He said again. "It's too dangerous!"

"Moony..." Sirius started,

“Don’t you ‘Moony’ me!” Remus said sharply, standing up. He had to pace; had to move, just to keep up with his thoughts. “It’s stupid! It’s the stupidest idea you’ve ever had!”

“It’s not *my* idea--”

“Don’t tell me you didn’t volunteer!” Remus rounded on him, furious, “Don’t tell me you didn’t jump at the chance!”

“To help my best friends?! To help *Harry*?! Of course I did!” Sirius was shouting too, and it was awful.

“Find someone else!” Remus begged, “Anyone! *I’ll* do it!”

“You can’t.” Sirius shook his head, “It has to be me, you know it does.”

“No!”

“You can’t just keep saying ‘no’. It’s done. It’s dealt with.”

Remus really thought he was going to hit Sirius for a moment. Hit him, or burst into tears like a child. He did neither. He sat down, hard, and covered his face with his hands.

“You bastard.” He muttered.

“It’s going to be ok. I’ve made sure.” Sirius said, reaching out to him. Remus batted his hand away.

“You just did it?! Without even telling me?”

“I’m telling you now!”

Remus glared at him. He was going to say something he regretted, in a minute. If he didn’t leave, he was going to say something he could never take back. He swallowed his rage, stood up, and walked out of the flat.

* * *

Friday 24th July 1981

So it was done. After that argument, everything happened very quickly. There were no goodbyes, Lily, James and Harry simply vanished without a trace. Remus knew better than to ask where they were - he wanted them to be safe, after all. And he wanted Sirius to be safe.

The Order was told that the Potters had gone into hiding; that Voldemort was after them because of Lily’s blood status, and her marriage to James.

“It’s awful, not trusting anyone, isn’t it?” Peter said as they left that meeting.

“Yeah.” Remus agreed glumly.

“It’s necessary.” Sirius said. “And if I knew who the spy was, I’d kill them myself. I wouldn’t even need magic.”

Peter and Remus stared at him, shocked.

“Sirius,” Remus said, putting a hand on his shoulder, “We can’t start acting like death eaters - James wouldn’t want--”

“James doesn’t want his child to be murdered by a lunatic on a power trip!” Sirius ranted, jerking away from Remus’s touch, “You’ve gone soft, Moony.”

If I have, Remus thought to himself, *it’s because of you*. No one fell in love with a hard heart; he’d learnt that lesson more than once.

Still, as dreadfully as Sirius was acting, Remus was inclined to make some allowances. It was a very difficult time - the darkest point in the war - and everyone was handling the pressure differently. Peter and Marlene threw themselves into work - they were rarely seen not rushing to one place or another. Mary seemed to withdraw into the muggle world more - she was always around when you needed her, but her mind often seemed to be in two places. Remus had his drinking and his self-pity. So if Sirius wanted to be the angry one for a bit, fine.

But it was still a war - war does not make allowances, or give anyone time to catch their breath. It is relentless and unforgiving, and unimaginably cruel.

It was only a week or so before Harry’s first birthday. Sirius had just got in from Diagon Alley - he’d gone in search of something appropriate for a one year old, and instead returned with an actual broomstick.

“Sirius!”

“Oh come on, Moony, it’s only little!”

“He’s a baby!”

“Got to train him young if he’s ever going to play for England!”

Remus laughed indulgently, and sipped his tea while he watched Sirius wrap the toy. He hadn’t seen him so happy in a while, and it was so nice. Then it happened.

There was a strange scent, first, which only Remus picked up. Familiar and friendly, magical. Then, in a flash of bright light, an enormous silver patronus burst through the wall. It was a lioness, and it prowled the room, snarling,

“Fucking hell!” Sirius leapt up, backing away.

The huge cat looked at them both with plaintive eyes, and opened its mouth. The scream with emanated from it was bone-chilling, and all too familiar. It was Mary.

“Help!” It wailed, “Hollyhock House!”

And then it vanished.

“That’s the McKinnon’s address.” Remus said, getting up to put his shoes on.

“Where are you going?” Sirius asked.

“To help Mary!” Remus said, impatiently, fumbling with his laces, “Come on!”

“Moony, no,” Sirius said, “We can’t, we have to follow protocol, contact Moody, or Arthur, or FRank, or--”

“Fuck protocol!” Remus shouted, “It’s Mary! She asked for help and I’m going. Stay here if you want.”

Of course Sirius didn't stay.

They arrived outside Hollyhock House maybe ten minutes after getting Mary's patronus. Neither of them had ever been to Marlene's home before, though she'd described it a few times. It was a lovely old tudor style cottage, located a few miles outside of a village in Sussex. There was a long garden path, with a border of bright pansies and geraniums - red, purple, yellow, pink. The front door was painted a soft dusky green, and if you craned your neck you could just make out the tops of three quidditch hoops in the back garden.

It might have been pretty, anyway. But not today.

Mary was standing at the top of the path by the roadside, frozen, staring blankly up at the blue sky. The dark mark hung over the yellow thatched roof; an enormous black cloud, the unmistakable shapes of skull and snake.

"No!" Remus gasped. Mary turned to him with tears in her eyes,

"They're all dead." She said.

"Are you sure?" Sirius said, taking a few steps up the path, wand raised.

"Yes." She said, "Yes, they're all lined up very neatly."

"What?" He looked back at her, frowning.

"Lined up... in a row..." she repeated. She swayed for a moment, and Remus put his arms around her, in case she was going to faint. She leaned into him, weeping silently.

"Stay with her." Sirius said, continuing up the path. Remus began to tremble. It was like a nightmare; like a horror film. He watched Sirius approach the door, push it open, call inside.

"We were supposed to meet for lunch today, but she never came," Mary whispered against Remus's shoulder, still clinging to him, "I thought she was just busy at the hospital... I tried to find her after work, but they said she'd never gone in... so I came here and I..."

"It's ok," Remus said, because what else do you say?

"The mark was there, and the door was open, and... oh god, Remus! All of them! Her mum, and her stepdad, and Yaz, and Danny... just lying there! Oh my god, their eyes!" She began to sob in earnest, and Remus held her tighter, feeling his insides turn to water.

Sirius came out of the house. Even at a distance, Remus could see the look of horror on his face. He made his way quickly towards them.

"I'm going to get Moody," he said. "I'll be back as soon as possible, ok? ...don't go in there."

And with that, he disappeared with a loud *CRACK*.

"That's it." Mary cried, hysterical, "It's over, I can't do this anymore!"

Song at the beginning is Heart of Glass by Blondie.

...god, I'm so sorry, gang :(
One more war chapter to go.

The War: Autumn 1981

Chapter Summary

This is it, guys...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I loved the words you wrote to me

But that was bloody yesterday.

I can't survive on what you send

Every time you need a friend.

I saw two shooting stars last night

I wished on them - but they were only satellites

Is it wrong to wish on space hardware?

I wish, I wish, I wish you'd care.

I don't want to change the world

I'm not looking for a new England

I'm just looking for another girl.

Nobody knew who had killed the McKinnons, and nobody knew why. There were theories, of course; the most logical being that with Danny and Marlene in the Order, they were simply an obvious target. Some people wondered if it was because of Marlene's connection to James and Lily - because she'd healed James. Others thought she'd made too much fuss about werewolf rights at work.

In the end, none of it mattered, not to Remus. Why try to make sense out of something so senseless?

Due to Danny's previous celebrity status, the murders were front page news. There was a huge picture of him in the Daily Prophet, from his Cannons days - broad, sunny face, robes billowing. No scars. A smaller picture of Marlene which must have been taken for work, because she was in her uniform. *Promising young Healer, Mylene McKinnon* according to the misspelt caption.

Yasmin was not mentioned at all, though Sirius told Remus they were found lying beside each other, and their fingers were still touching.

“Remember in third year,” Sirius said, in the days that followed, “We all thought you two fancied each other.”

“Yeah.” Remus replied, monotone.

“She was a better beater than me. Wish I’d told her.”

“She knew.” Remus said, with a sad smirk.

Mary was not heard from for a long while. Marlene’s death hit her harder than anyone - they had been practically inseparable since they were eleven. Remus remembered how annoying he used to find them, before he figured out that girls were just people too.

He remembered her quiet patience, her bouts of fiery passion. The petition to remove the Whomping Willow when she was just thirteen, because someone had been hurt, and Marlene could never stand to see anyone hurt, not if there was something she could do about it. If any one of them had it in them to change the world, it had been her. But no more.

* * *

Another September rolled around, and as always, Remus was reminded of his childhood, and Hogwarts. The scent of parchment, new ink, leather book bags and sealing wax. A sense of fresh beginnings; of change. How can it have been a full decade since he first arrived at King’s Cross, scrawny and angry and neglected?

So much had changed since then. He had become a man. He had learnt more than he ever thought possible, achieved things he had never dreamed of - his horizons had been expanded again and again, by education, and magic, and friendship, and love. He wasn’t completely different, of course. Remus didn’t kid himself; his temper hadn’t really gone anywhere, nor had his proclivity to repress bad feelings, only to lash out when things got too much.

But he thought he’d been doing *better*, at least with the people he loved. At least with Sirius. He had opened up and revealed more of himself to Sirius than to anyone else. He had shared feelings which every instinct told him to keep hidden. It hadn’t always been easy - they had fought, they had shouted, they had cried. But it had been *worth* it.

At least, Remus thought it had.

He wasn’t so sure about Sirius. Maybe it was the toll of the war - too many deaths, too many near misses. Maybe it was the separation from James. Maybe Remus had just tested his patience one too many times. He couldn’t put his finger on it. All Remus knew was that something was very, very wrong.

It was mid-September by the time he really realised it had happened. Sirius had slipped away from him. They were often apart - Remus had come to see this as a fact of life; their skills were so different, they had different jobs to do. It was nothing, in service of the war. They were glad to do it, and proud to do it.

But after some weeks, Remus came to see that this distance was something else, *more* than just the usual stress. Sirius had pulled back.

“Miss you.” Remus said, one night. It had taken all day to raise the courage for those two stupid

words.

"I'm right here." Sirius smiled tiredly, sitting across the table, picking at dinner with his fork.

Then, after a while, he spoke again; "It'll all be over soon. We have to trust Dumbledore, that's all."

Remus could have wept.

"But *you're* the only one I trust."

Sirius just looked at him, sadly. Remus couldn't bear that look, it made him feel stupid for being in love. Stupid for caring about anything other than winning the war.

Finally Sirius got up. He picked up his plate and dumped the contents in the bin.

"Got to go." He said. "Moody wants me to check in. Be back late, don't stay up waiting."

He didn't kiss him goodbye.

Remus was at a loss. Once again, he found himself with a problem that was almost unspeakable. He couldn't ask James or Lily - even if he knew how to reach them, they had plenty to worry about on their own. Peter had never been very keen to hear about anything to do with Remus and Sirius's relationship, and though he was a good mate - one of Remus's *best* mates - they didn't really confide in each other like that. Marlene might have helped, but Remus didn't want to think about it. And of course, Mary's grief didn't leave much room for romantic advice.

Deep down, Remus knew that he ought to ask Sirius outright. Except.

Except he was terrified of the answer. He was terrified that it wasn't about the war, or James or growing up. He was terrified that the problem was him. What if Sirius had just fallen out of love?

This anxiety worried away at Remus as the nights drew in and the days turned colder. It all seemed to make a horrible kind of sense; the distance, the unwillingness to talk, the lack of affection, their non-existent sex life. And that look. The look Sirius kept levelling at him - as if Remus was a stranger.

It was intolerable. Remus didn't know if he could cope with another loss.

So, in early October, when Moody had an assignment for him, Remus was hopeful. Mad-eye took him aside at the end of an Order meeting,

"We've had eyes on the pack." he grunted.

"Greyback?"

"Don't think so. The insurgents, we reckon. They're hiding out in a forest in Germany."

"Oh," Remus said, surprised. Was it Castor? "Have they attacked someone?"

"No, been keeping their heads down, by the looks of things."

"That's good, isn't it?" Remus said, "We ought to just leave them alone."

"Trust me, lad, I'd prefer to," Moody replied, with a wry smile, "But desperate times call for desperate measures. We're sending you out."

“To do what? They left Greyback - they left Voldemort. Wasn’t that the plan?”

“It was. Two years ago. We’ve lost a lot of good people since then. Notice how cosy these meetings are getting?”

It was true. The first Order meeting Remus had attended had been overwhelming - the room was packed with witches and wizards ready to fight; to take on the death eaters. Now there were too many missing faces - the McKinnons and the Potters, the Prewetts, old Darius Barebones, Dorcas, Caradoc Dearborn, Benjy Fenwick, Ferox...

“So...” Remus thought hard, “Now you want to recruit the werewolves?”

“Bingo.”

“After years of legislating against them? After forcing them out of jobs? Out of their *homes* ?!” Remus knew he was being rude - no one spoke to Alastor Moody like that - but he was too tired, too battle-weary to care.

Moody didn’t seem fazed. Remus supposed he got a lot worse abuse from much scarier wizards.

“We know it’s a bit of a big ask. But as I said, desperate times.”

“And is there anything I can offer them in return for, y’know, their lives?!”

“Voldemort’s worse.” Moody returned, “Whatever their lives are now, Voldemort will only make them worse.”

Remus sighed heavily. “Fine.”

He was ready to go, anyway. He was ready for a change; ready to get out of London, out of his miserable life and back to being useful. He even entertained the idea that a long absence might help the Sirius situation. Didn’t absence make the heart grow fonder?

It might be a relief; some breathing space, some time to think. He tested this theory, in his last conversation with Sirius.

“You’ll be glad to have a few weeks off, eh?” He smiled - which took every bit of his strength.

“Hm?” Sirius frowned, looking up from some blueprints he’d been scanning. He looked annoyed at the interruption, and Remus felt a horrible tearing inside his chest. “What did you say?”

“I said you’ll be glad to be rid of me, for a bit.” Remus continued, bravely. “Have me out of the way.”

“Why would you say it like that?” Sirius stared at him, blankly.

“Like what? I just meant... you know, you can have some time to think.”

“There’s no time to think, not until the war’s over.” Sirius snapped, returning to his blueprints, “It’ll be the same whether you’re here or not.”

That was all Remus could take. He picked up his wand and a packet of cigarettes and left for Germany with only the briefest of goodbyes - as if he was only popping to the shops. He fumed, as he walked to the portkey location. That prick! Give him two weeks on his own, then he’d see; then he’d realise what a dickhead he was being.

Remus would come back, fresh and wild from the forests, and Sirius would be so sorry, so affectionate, and there would be time to talk and mend, and fall in love again.

That was all they needed; a bit more time.

* * *

Tuesday, 13 October 1981

Remus was right, too. At least for himself, he did feel much better once he'd left the country. It was so much easier not to think about Sirius - or anything at all in the wizarding world - while he was hidden away in the velvety depths of the Black Forest.

He chose to arrive the afternoon before the full moon - best to approach the pack as a wolf.

The transformation was quick - the woods around him were teeming with life and ancient magic, amplifying the razor sharp power of the full moon. The night itself was as familiar and terrifying as his wolf pelt. The pack found him, close to dawn. They welcomed him home with glee, and gathered around, throwing back their necks to howl gorgeously up at the night sky, until the stars rang with their singing.

As they all returned to human form, Remus writhed back into life amongst a scrum of other bodies, and Castor's hands on him, already healing his wounds.

"It is good to see you, Remus Lupin."

They all walked slowly through the trees as the butter yellow October light filtered down onto the leaf litter.

In the time the pack had been living there, they had constructed a small village of wattle huts to live in. They all curled up to sleep on soft dry moss with birdsong trilling overhead.

Remus woke up without knots in his shoulders, and without his jaw clenched. He was relaxed for the first time in months. Castor lay beside him, so warm, and so peaceful, his soft brown skin pressing against Remus's in places. Remembering his humanity, Remus pulled away, slightly. Castor's eyes opened, and peered into his.

"Are you well, Remus Lupin?"

"Yes, fine thanks." He rubbed his eyes. Castor kept watching him.

"You are suffering." He said. A statement, not a question.

"I've lost some people." Remus said, "We're losing the war."

"Yes," Castor agreed. "And you have come to ask for our help, is that not so, Remus Lupin?"

"I know it's not a small thing..."

"We will stay here. This is our home."

"You understand I wouldn't ask unless the situation was desperate. You understand... Voldemort won't spare werewolves, either?"

"We do." Castor said, simply. "And we are agreed. We will stay here. We will hide - we are good at it."

“I found you.”

“Yes, Remus Lupin. You will always be welcome.”

Remus sat up, and reached for the wolfskin cloak at his feet, covering himself with it.

“Well that's that, then.” He said. “I'd better get back.”

Castor reached up and placed a hand on his arm.

“Stay a while, Remus Lupin. We have so much to show you. Perhaps then you will see.”

So Remus stayed. He thought that if he spent a bit of time with them, as before, he might be able to talk to them, change somebody's mind. Most of them had wizarding family back in the UK, he had to be able to appeal to them, surely.

He couldn't go back to the Order without trying - everyone else was giving their whole selves to the fight, and this was, after all, his purpose. If he couldn't be a decent emissary to the werewolves, then what good was he at all?

Still, it wasn't a difficult decision to make. It was no great sacrifice. He had nothing to go back to except a very difficult conversation with Sirius.

And he *did* talk to them. Over the three weeks Remus spent with the werewolves in October 1981, he spoke to each and every one of them. He reasoned, he sermonised, he ranted. But it was no use at all; they were all happy. Not in a mad, deluded ‘everything is perfect’ way, as some of the Greyback followers had been. But in a practical, empowered way - they saw a future for themselves, they saw a way to live a life free from cruelty or intervention. It wasn't for everyone - it definitely wasn't for Remus - but he couldn't deny they were making it work.

In fact, as time went on, Remus lost track of who was doing the persuading. Everyone was so keen to take him hunting, to show him how to weave wood, or cast protective spells which made them almost invisible to humans. He was never hungry, or cold, or in fear for his life.

“Do you see now?” Castor asked one evening, as Halloween approached.

“Yes, I see.” Remus replied, staring up at the thatched ceiling. “You'd all rather hide, like cowards.”

“You do not believe that, Remus Lupin.” Castor smirked, settling down to sleep. He occasionally demonstrated actual emotion, now that he and Remus were so close.

Remus had elected to keep sharing a hut with him. He didn't like sleeping alone, and it wasn't as if anything was *going on*, it just made sense. He had to stay close to the leader, it was what anyone would do. And yes, it was an intense relationship, but that simply *didn't mean* it was anything to do with sex. That was simply how things were, with the werewolves, everything was motivated by scent and instinct and the phases of the moon.

Still, Remus knew how it would look. He didn't kid himself that Sirius was going to suddenly have a change of heart and come racing desperately to Germany to find him, but Remus knew that it was pretty wrong, even without a chance of getting caught. It was pathetic, too. He scolded himself about it, through the long dark nights; *you're a ridiculous excuse for a man. A few weeks feeling ignored and you're cosying up to the next good looking bloke who shows you any interest. And you haven't even got the balls to do anything about it.*

In the end it was his desire for Castor that told him he needed to leave. And his love for Sirius. Remus had done some very drastic and very stupid things in his life, but he was not going to run away to live in a forest just to escape talking to the love of his life. He would go home, and he would force himself to confront it. He would do everything he could to keep Sirius, because deep down, he knew that it was the only thing that really mattered.

* * *

2nd November 1981

The portkey had closed, and Remus couldn't get in touch with anyone. He had to get himself back to Britain alone, apparating part of the way, hitching lifts the rest.

By the time Remus had staggered his way into London, he hadn't even the energy to apparate. He got a bus instead, and fell asleep half the way to Leicester Square. He got off and stopped at his usual corner shop for a pouch of tobacco. He bought two Mars bars as well - if Sirius was in, he could have one. If not then tough luck, Remus would scoff them both.

As he unlocked his front door, he could hear the phone ringing. It took him a few moments to get in - the wooden frame had swollen with all the rainfall, and the door got gummed up sometimes - but when he got in, it was still ringing. *Must be urgent*, he thought, absent-mindedly.

He shouted, "Padfoot? You in?" as he crossed the the room, then lifted the receiver, "Hello?"

"Hello? Hello, Remus, is that you?"

"Mary? Hi! I just got back - where the hell is everybody?!"

There was a strange silence on the end of the phone, and a horrible static prickle ran down his spine. "Mary?!"

"You haven't heard..."

"Jesus Christ, Mary, what?!"

"Remus... something awful has happened."

She started explaining, and Remus fell to his knees as the whole world began to fall apart.

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is "A New England" by Billy Bragg.

Armistice

Chapter Summary

Sort of a 'war chapters' epilogue.

Chapter Notes

The lines of poetry are from The Epic of Gilgamesh.

He who endured my hardships with me

He now has gone to the fate that awaits mankind

Day and night, I have wept for him

I would not give him over for burial

For what if he had risen at my cries?

Six days and seven nights I waited

Until a worm crawled out of his nose

Since he has gone

There is no life left for me.

* * *

James died first. Remus ought to have expected that. He would have been waiting right at the front door; it would never even cross his mind to hide, or run.

Then Lily, standing in front of her son. Remus pictured her defiant face, her hands gripping the sides of the cot, her green eyes blazing. She would have met death with her eyes wide open, that was certain.

And then Peter, next. Oh Peter, the idiot - the brave, ridiculous idiot. He must have heard about James and Lily, he must have known *at once* who was to blame. After all those years in James and Sirius's shadow, Peter's first instinct had been to face Black himself.

He'd inadvertently led Aurors right to Sirius, so his brutal death hadn't been completely in vain.

Right to Sirius.

And there was the block. Like a curtain falling across the scene, Remus's mind wouldn't touch Sirius. He couldn't get there; couldn't picture any of it. He supposed that was his brain's way of protecting him. It hurt enough just knowing the bare facts.

Mary came over as soon as she'd hung up the phone. She was the only person he could have tolerated, anyway, and god; she was so strong. He lay his head in her lap, and she stroked his hair like a mother.

"Sirius," he wept, over and over, clinging to her skirt, "Sirius!"

"I know," she whispered back, tears streaming down her cheeks, dripping into his hair. "I know, I know..."

She'd brought a sleeping draught with her, and Remus drank it all down greedily, eager for escape. While he slept, Mary packed up all of Sirius's things. All of his clothes, his records, his books. When Remus got up, the flat seemed almost empty.

"I had Darren move them down to the garage," she explained. "You don't need to touch any of it until you're ready. The bike's gone, I don't know where."

"He must have taken it." Remus said, feeling numb. He was already wondering how much alcohol he had in the flat, and whether or not he ought to wait for Mary to leave before he started working his way through it.

"Remus... I have to go, now." She said, gently, standing up, hugging herself. She looked small. Mary had always been a larger than life sort of girl, but Remus realised that she could barely be 5'5.

"Yes, of course." He murmured. There was definitely some gin under the sink in the kitchen.

"I'll be gone for a while," she said. "I'm going... Darren's taking me to Jamaica, to stay with family. I need some time away, I don't know when I'll be back."

"Oh." He looked her in the eye, properly. She wasn't wearing any makeup - he hadn't seen Mary without eyeliner and lipstick since she was twelve.

"Is there... can someone stop by, to see you? I don't mind making a phone call for you?"

"It's fine." He said, "Don't worry about me."

"But I will." She said, smiling half-heartedly. "Are you sure I can't contact anyone?"

"There's no one." He said. *I've got no one.*

"Perhaps speak to Moody? Or Arthur?"

"Yeah, good idea." Remus nodded. He didn't want to talk to anyone, but he didn't want her to worry. "Do you know... What are we supposed to do, now?"

"I don't know."

"Have you spoken to Dumbledore?"

"Ha." Mary snorted, "Good luck getting hold of him. Too busy being congratulated by the ministry. He'll probably be at the... the memorial service."

Remus felt as if an ice cold blade was twisting in his gut. This couldn't be real.

"Why us." He said, looking up at her, desperate for answers, "Out of everyone. Why is it you and me left, and not Lily and James? Who decided that?! It's bollocks!"

“I know, sweetheart.” She said, softly. “I know.”

He couldn't wait any longer, he went to the kitchen and grabbed the nearest open bottle from the cupboard. Gin, leftover from some party or other. He didn't pour a glass, just drank.

“Remus,” Mary said, chewing her lip, watching him from the living room, “I really do have to go... do you promise you'll get in touch with Arthur?”

“Yeah.” He nodded. He just wanted her to leave, now. “See ya.”

“Goodbye, love. I'll be back, I promise.”

And she left. And Remus was alone.

* * *

Chapter Summary

I wrote this chapter immediately after the very first chapter of this fic, so I am sorry to say we have always been heading in this direction.

Warnings for depression, grief, alcoholism/alcohol abuse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*Times at a distance, times without touch,
Greed forms the habit of asking to much,
Followed at bedtime by builders and bells,
Wait 'til the doldrums which nothing dispels.*

*Idly, mentally, doubtful and dread -
Who runs with the beans shall go stale with the bread.
Let me lie fallow in dormant dismay
Tell me tomorrow, don't bother today.*

*Fucking ada! Fucking ada!
Fucking ada! Fucking ada!*

*Tried like a good 'un, did it all wrong
Thought that the hard way was taking to long
To late for regret or chemical change;
Yesterday's targets have gone out of range.*

*Failure enfolds me with clammy green arms,
Damn the excursions and blast the alarms,*

For the rest of what's natural I'll lay on the ground;

Tell me tomorrow if I'm still around.

FUCKING ADA, FUCKING ADA!

New Years Day 1982

THUD-THUD-THUD-THUD-THUD-THUD

Someone was banging on the door.

They'd been doing it for a while now, and showed no sign of stopping. If anything, it was getting worse.

Remus opened his eyes. His throat was dry and his head hurt. Actually, everything hurt; he'd been sleeping on the couch for weeks. Or months? Who cared. It was uncomfortable, but he couldn't bring himself to enter the bedroom. Most nights he was too drunk to move anyway. Most days he was too drunk. He didn't have hangovers anymore, just breaks between bottles. The kid next door didn't mind running down to the off licence every other day for him, he was probably making a killing in spare change.

The banging continued.

"Remus?!" The muffled sound came through the door, and whoever was on the other side kept hammering away,

"Fuck off," he shouted, his throat raw as sandpaper.

He reached for the nearest bottle on the floor beneath him and swigged from it. He nearly choked on the burning whisky, but managed to get most of it down, thank god. He couldn't afford to waste one drop of oblivion.

"Remus? Let me in!"

It was Grant. He recognised the voice now - maybe the scent too, but his senses had been a mess, ever since... *no, no no no...*

He curled up, burying his head in the sofa cushions. He couldn't talk to anyone. He couldn't see anyone. He just needed to be left, to drink and to forget. *Please* .

"Fuck off!" He sobbed, yelling at the door, "Leave me alone!"

"No!" Grant shouted back, and the banging got louder still, a relentless, resounding thud-thud-thud. He was actually trying to break the door down, the stupid prat.

Remus half considered just casting a silencing spell. But he wasn't sure where his wand was. He rolled over again, and got up.

There were bottles and cans all over the floor, and they clinked and rustled as he waded through. His arms and legs felt like lead. What day was it? It was cold. He rubbed his arms as he

approached the door, shuddering against the chill. He'd left a window open somewhere in the flat and forgotten to shut it. Oh well.

The door was still being thumped as he reached it, the wood would splinter if he wasn't careful.

"What?!" He yanked the door open.

Grant stared at him, fist still raised, wide eyed. His cheeks were pink from shouting, he was breathing heavily. He looked Remus up and down.

"Jesus christ." He said, rudely pushing his way in, "What happened? I've been trying to ring ya for days, what's wrong with the phone?"

"Off the hook." Remus said, slowly returning to his nest on the couch, where at least it was warm. He curled his cold feet under himself and picked up the bottle again.

"The fuck's been going on here?" Grant looked around at the mess. He looked at Remus again, "...gawd, 'e ain't left you, has 'e?"

Remus stared up at him, and he couldn't help it. He began to cry. He leaned forward on his knees, dropping his head into his hands, and he bawled like a child.

"Shit," Grant hurried over to sit next to him, not minding the empty cans, the smelly cushions and blankets, "Me and my big mouth! I'm sorry! I didn't mean..." he pulled Remus to him without a thought, and it must have been awful, because Remus knew he hadn't washed in ages, all he'd done was drink and cry for days and days and days, but Grant held him fast.

"They're all gone." Remus said, when he could speak. "I'm alone."

"Bollocks." Said Grant. "You're not alone."

Remus cried even harder.

* * *

Not a single day went by – and not one day would ever go by, for many years – that he did not think of Sirius and suffer. It was an abstract and cruel torture, and Remus resigned himself to a life of utter misery.

Everywhere he looked he was haunted by thoughts and memories of his friends, of the things they could never do, and the things he had not done in time. He attended the funeral - a joint one for Lily and James, followed by a memorial for Peter. Remus sat at the back, and left before the wake, in case anyone tried to speak to him.

He was terrified that someone might ask him about Sirius - might ask him what he knew. Or tell him something he didn't want to know. So Remus did not stay to reminisce, or 'celebrate' his friends' lives, (honestly, what a despicable idea). He went home alone, and got drunk. He got drunk every day for weeks.

He stayed at the flat in Soho – he had no choice in the matter; no money, no family. No friends.

The Order disbanded and those who still had lives worth living didn't want to know him. He couldn't find any work in the wizarding world and – never having felt at home in it anyway – chose to withdraw.

After learning about the fate of the Longbottoms in the Daily Prophet, he stopped reading the papers. He did not re-connect to the floo network, he did not use magic at all unless he really had to. He never went to Diagon Alley, and for all intents and purposes lived as a muggle.

Mary sent postcards from Jamaica, from Trinidad, from Saint Lucia - she seemed to have family all over the Caribbean. She kept saying sorry. Remus didn't know what for; they'd both lost the same things. At least she cared enough to get in touch.

Dumbledore actually did try to contact him a couple of times, but Remus deliberately made himself difficult to reach. He was furious at the old man, who as far as Remus was concerned had never lifted a finger to help. Who had thrust them all into the war, young as they were, and stupid as they were, and who watched them die one by one without so much as blinking. Even the baby, Harry, was quickly tidied away into some anonymous corner of Surrey. The marauders might never have existed at all. Better that they hadn't.

For a while, Remus wondered when it would end.

After long enough, he realised it never would, and so just tried to dull the pain. It might have been selfish, but what else was left but to be selfish? He had sacrificed plenty.

When the first full moon came, the November after that grisly Halloween, Remus was forced to leave the flat. He apparated back to the forest he'd stayed in with Greyback's pack, back in '79. It was better than a cell. He wouldn't be locked up, he wouldn't allow it. So he left, he transformed, and he wandered the woods alone, howling and hunting and snarling. The first time was a relief, but the wolf was lonely. The second time, he went to the Black Forest.

He didn't intend to live amongst the werewolves, he just used them as an escape route.

They knew little of the war, except that it was over. The first time, Castor sensed Remus's pain at once. They didn't speak of it - because there was no need. They simply transformed and dealt with it as wolves. Remus decided that whatever happened when they were not human didn't count, as long as they didn't hurt anyone. It was freeing, and the only relief Remus knew in those darkest months after his loss.

In the mornings after the moon, Remus would stay a little longer each time, just to be near them. With nothing left to lose, he gave up any pretence of superiority when it came to the pack, and in time, Castor finally got what he wanted.

Remus couldn't deny his attraction to Castor much longer, and after all; who did he need to be loyal to? Was he supposed to live celibate for the rest of his life simply because his first love had broken his heart? And there was no love between him and Castor. Only animal need; bestial rutting. It was good, but it was only another way to forget. And Remus always returned to London, sore and still unsatisfied.

In the human world, Grant still came back for regular visits, after that first time. He took the spare key, and popped in to check on Remus between his lectures and pub shifts. He was both a help and a hindrance, bringing bottles of muggle spirits and other substances - whatever Remus asked for.

He'd been kicked out of his bedsit for soliciting (not true, he insisted - the landlady just had it in for him) and now Grant bounced between boyfriends' beds and friends couches. Sometimes he even stayed with Remus for a night or two, and that was ok, Remus didn't mind. He didn't care about very much, as long as he had plenty to drink. He needed to be drunk. Before the war ended, it had just been a way to take the edge off; to change his mood. Now it *was* his mood; the only one he could bear.

It was Grant who talked at him, nagged him, dragged him out of bed and pushed him into the shower when he needed to. He even did the laundry, and bought groceries with Remus's remaining dwindling funds.

Remus, for his part, behaved abysmally. He made spiteful comments, hurled insults. But Grant paid it no mind, and kept returning all the same.

"You only come back because you're basically homeless." Remus spat one evening, from the couch, as Grant collected the rubbish littered around him. Remus couldn't bear the clinking sound empty bottles made.

"Yep," Grant replied, blithely, carrying on about his business, "That's exactly right, Remus me old pal. Nuffink to do with the fact that I love your dozy arse."

Remus snorted disdainfully. Grant didn't know what he was talking about. *Love!* Remus knew the truth now. He knew that love was just something people said to make you weak - to keep you pliant. Never again. *Never never never* .

Miraculously, Grant never once asked what had happened. Even when Remus began to show signs of improvement, started getting himself up and dressed without hours of nudging, even when he started leaving the house. Grant never asked *why* .

Remus knew he had ranted, in his drunken stupors, pouring out misery and rage about Sirius and James and Lily and poor, poor Peter, and Sirius and Sirius and *Sirius* ...

Whether Grant understood half of it, or whether Remus said too much, he never knew. But Grant kept coming back, anyway.

"I'll keep coming, long as you need me." He'd say, cheerfully as he flitted about. "Us care home yobs gotta stick together, innit."

Remus didn't believe him. Grant was being nice, but that could only last so long. Nobody stayed around forever.

Chapter End Notes

The song for his chapter is Fucking Ada by Ian Dury and the Blockheads. ('Fucking Ada!' is a cockney expression/exclamation of disbelief/displeasure/despair).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

These people 'round here

Wear beat down eyes sunk in smoke dried faces

They're resigned to what their fate is.

But not us, (no never) no not us (no never)

We are far too young and clever.

6th June 1983

“Sometimes I wonder if you’re using me.” Grant said, one afternoon in the summer of 1983.

“We all use each other.” Remus replied, dryly, “And that’s what we think love is.”

“Christ. Can’t talk to you when you’re like this.” Grant sighed heavily, reaching for a packet of cigarettes on the bedside table.

“Like what?”

“A gloomy git.”

Grant pulled a long white cylinder from the box with his teeth, and Remus lit it with his wand point. Grant sucked on it appreciatively, settling back against Remus’s body, in the crook of his arm. Remus lazily stroked Grant’s collar bone until it was his turn to smoke. They’d almost given up; sharing a quick post-sex fag was their treat.

“Sorry.” Remus said, “I don’t mean to be gloomy.”

“Pfft.” Grant replied, cheerfully, “Be gloomy if you want, I’m only teasin' ya. ”

Grant made everything so easy. Remus could barely remember when their relationship had grown into what it was now.

...

It had started with the regular visits, after that first intervention. They’d grown more frequent, and eventually Grant was just there all the time - first he slept on the couch, and then he didn’t anymore, and it was never discussed again.

By midsummer 1982, he’d moved all of his belongings in - such that they were.

“I travel light,” he winked, shaking out a rucksack that contained a few clean pairs of underwear and some t-shirts. *One sock. For god’s sake.*

“I’ll give you some money.” Remus said, monotonously. “You can go shopping.” He still had a

few hundred pounds Sirius had converted to muggle money in case of emergencies. Remus didn't feel guilty about spending it; it was just sitting there.

"I'm not here to scrounge off you." Grant insisted.

"I know. But you need clothes."

"Yes mum. I'll borrow some of yours for a bit, 'til I get myself sorted."

"Fine."

So Remus went to Debenhams by himself one afternoon and bought as much as he could in Grant's size. Jeans and t-shirts and underwear and socks and jumpers, pyjamas and even a cheap pair of trainers that were on offer. Bright colours, because Grant was a bright person, and Remus had seen enough black to last a lifetime. He folded it all away in the chest of drawers. It felt good to fill them; they'd been standing half-empty for over a year.

Grant wore the clothes, but they never discussed it.

There were some things they could not avoid talking about, though.

Remus hadn't been doing magic at all for the first few months - actually, he found that he couldn't, a lot of the time; even when he tried. Perhaps the grief. All those funerals. It may have had more to do with his drinking, though he couldn't be sure. There was a block there; like a wall had gone up. He could apparate for full moons, but that was the extent of it. Then one day, it just came back, as if it had never left him.

They'd forgotten to pay the electric, and the lights went dead. Without thinking, Remus lit his wand,

"*Lumos*."

"What the bloody fuck is that?!" Grant leapt away as if Remus had set himself on fire.

"Er..." Remus swallowed, then resigned himself to it. "It's a magic wand."

"Are you high?"

Remus laughed, a gruff, alien sound.

"I think I'd better explain some stuff to you. The school I went to was a bit... different..."

He began to explain. He knew how weird it must all sound, and he had to leave quite a lot of stuff out. Almost twenty minutes later, Grant sat staring at him, face pale in the weakening wandlight.

"You're having me on." He laughed, nervously, "What are you playing at, making up a load of tosh like that?!"

"Grant... look..." Remus made sparks with his wand. He levitated the coffee table, and then - showing off, because it had been so long - transformed his mug into a frog.

"All right!" Grant recoiled, as the frog hopped onto the carpet, "Ok, I believe you! Jesus Christ!"

"Oh, just 'Remus Lupin' will do." Remus stuck his tongue out.

Then he stopped, realised what he was doing.

He'd stopped hurting for a moment, and chastised himself viciously for it. *Your friends are dead, and you're doing magic tricks for some muggle? Pathetic.*

He went to look in the cupboards for a drink.

"Oh no, don't..." Grant said, sounding disappointed.

Remus returned to the couch with a bottle of vodka and two tumblers. He liked vodka the most, it went down easy.

"I don't want any." Grant said, ignoring the second glass. "I'm going to stop getting it for you."

Remus shrugged and knocked back his first measure.

Grant sighed. "So you're a wizard, eh? Does that mean... Sirius was a wizard, too?"

Remus nearly choked on his second shot, but got it down. His eyes watered and he nodded.

"Yeah. We all are. Were."

And he drank more, and told Grant about the war. He left out some of the more painful details, but Grant was astute, and guessed the rest.

"Is that where you vanish off to, every month?" Grant asked, "Some magic thing?"

"Oh... no. There's something else."

"Bloody hell, Remus, do I know *anything* about you?!"

"Sorry." Remus said. "Honestly, I'm really not worth the effort... once you know everything, you'll understand."

"Try me." Grant said.

So then they had the werewolf conversation. Remus explained what happened to him on full moons, and how dangerous he was, and where he went.

"Since you were five?!" Grant said, aghast.

"Yeah." Remus nodded, nervously.

"You poor thing," Grant shook his head, and stroked his hand. "You've had a rough go of it, 'aven't ya?"

Remus accepted the sympathy, and didn't say too much about Castor, because he was ashamed of himself.

Not that Grant would have been jealous. *Not like Sirius, not like... oh, oh no, no no no...*

...

"Oi!"

Back in the present, Grant snapped his fingers. He held up the cigarette, half smoked. "Your turn, gorgeous."

"Sorry." Remus took it, and inhaled deeply. Ah. They were still in bed. Everything was ok.

Everything is ok.

“You drifted away from me, there.” Grant commented, without accusation.

“Sorry,” Remus said again.

“Penny for ‘em?”

“Oh, nothing. Just thinking.” He stubbed out the cigarette. Fucking hell he missed smoking.

“Well.” Grant rolled over, lying half on top of Remus, face centimetres away, “*That’s* no good, is it? I was trying to *stop* you from thinking.”

“You do.” Remus smiled. They kissed, friendly at first, then deeper. Remus slid his hands up Grant’s long body. “Want to try again?”

Grant smiled against his lips, murmuring,

“You just want another fag, doncha?”

“I want *you* , too...”

“Well, tough luck,” Grant pulled away, pushing himself off Remus, off the bed. “Last shift at the pub starts in forty minutes, already gonna have to leg it.”

“Do you have to?” Remus flopped back on the bed, petulant.

“Oh, don’t whinge, princess, it’s only one more evening. Oi, be good and stay off the booze and I’ll do something *really nice* when I get in.”

“I’ll be asleep.”

“I’ll wake you up.”

Remus smirked. “Ok then.”

Grant made everything so easy.

He tried to stay off the drink that night, he really did. But he needed *something* , or else how would he ever sleep? And he definitely didn’t smoke, so that was pretty good. He wanted to be good, for Grant’s last night at the pub.

After getting three A-levels in Social Policy, Politics and Education, then studying for months for further exams, Grant had qualified as a social worker. He was beginning a placement at a boys remand centre the following week. Remus didn’t know where he got the balls for it.

“It’ll be like doing St Edmunds all over again!”

“No it won’t,” Grant smiled, “It’ll be different, because I’ll make it different.”

* * *

They were pretty happy together. They had their moments, anyway, but they were always friends before lovers and neither of them were faithful.

Grant had plenty of other boyfriends in his never ending quest for variety. They might be arty

types, with long hair and camp affectations. Or earnest, political sorts, in baggy khaki fatigues and thick knitted jumpers, campaigning for nuclear disarmament or gay and lesbian rights, or the miners or something. Remus watched them come and go with a distant interest. He didn't begrudge Grant – he knew he was hardly a barrel of laughs to be with.

Remus himself had become excellent at dividing his life up into neat segments with razor sharp edges. Castor was a bad habit; Grant was everything else. Then there was Sirius's spectre, looming over the whole thing, making sure he was never really happy with either of them.

"You could stay, brother," Castor said, every time.

"Can you not call me 'brother' *right* after you've been fucking me?" Remus snapped. He was often rude to Castor, and Castor was rough with him right back. Remus wasn't sure if it was a wolf thing or a self-punishment thing, but he tried not to analyse the arrangement too much.

"Remus Lupin, then." Castor replied.

"It's just *Remus* ." He grunted, getting up to dress himself. "And you know I can't stay. I've got a life back in England."

"You say that," Castor raised an eyebrow, "But I see no evidence. We would care for you here."

"I don't trust any of you as far as I could throw you." Remus said flatly, buttoning up his jeans.

"And yet you return each month..."

"Yeah, well, that's just for this," Remus gestured at Castor's naked body, reclining back on grey furs - he was absolutely perfect in every way, a greek statue, lithe and muscular and delicious. "Let's not start pretending we like each other."

"But we are your pack!" Castor protested.

"Look, I'll stop coming at all, if you don't leave off." Remus gritted his teeth. He did stop going, for two months after that, just to make Castor suffer.

Remus didn't need a pack, and he *certainly* didn't need friends.

Sometimes Mary tried to get in touch, sometimes he let her. But it was hard, so very hard. He preferred Grant, and their modest muggleish life together.

And really, though their life was not one Remus had ever imagined living, it was hardly empty. Remus took up various odd jobs - cleaning, mostly; or courier work, because it was cash-in-hand no one cared if he stopped showing up.

Grant studied for his licence and always had students around, debating in the living room, preparing for another protest against Poll Tax or for nuclear disarmament. They made a huge mess of the living room painting banners and nailing together placards, but Remus didn't mind a bit of chaos.

He liked the girls Grant invited over better than he liked the boys - they were all so vibrant, so passionate, with punky green hair and boyish, mischievous attitudes. He didn't care much for the causes, but the conversation was always lively. At times he felt he was speaking to Mary, or Marlene, or Lily. Then he would slow down, and he'd need a drink. He would stand quietly in the kitchen until they all left.

“Oh, Remus. You can’t just wander off and get pissed every time you’re sad.” Grant sighed one night, when he found Remus slumped over the kitchen table, hours after everyone had left.

“I *am* sad.” Remus sobbed.

“I know you are mate,” Grant bent down and pulled Remus’s arm over his shoulder, hoisting him up towards bed. “And you’re allowed to be sad. It's the drink we’ve got the problem with, eh?”

“No one owes you a happy life.” Remus mournfully parroted Matron’s old adage as they swayed down the hall together.

"No," Grant huffed, setting him into bed. He looked down at Remus pityingly, "But you owe yourself one, love."

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Come on Eileen' by Dexys Midnight Runners.

British dictionary:

- Debenhams - National chain of department stores. Every mum's favourite.
- Trainers - Sneakers/tennis shoes/runners/kicks
- 'Penny for 'em?' - Penny for your thoughts (i.e. 'tell me what you're thinking').
- Boys' Remand Centre - Criminal detention centre for boys under 17.
- Poll Tax - Brought in by Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative government in the '80s, this tax paid for Local Government (now called 'Council Tax'). Before 1979, this was paid by each household based on the market rental value of the property. The Poll Tax was a flat rate per person - meaning that the burden of payment shifted from wealthy home owners to poor renters. It was massively unfair and resulted in nationwide protests and rioting.

As I mentioned (on tumblr maybe?) as long as my mood stays like this, I'm hoping to crack out a chapter every day now until we're done. Approx. ten days :)

Chapter Summary

Warning - mention of HIV/AIDS (no deaths! I promise!)
Also a lot of sex discussed in this chapter, nothing graphic.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*I've been loving you a long time;
Down all the years, down all the days.
And I've cried for all your troubles,
Smiled at your funny little ways.
We watched our friends grow up together
And we saw them as they fell.
Some of them fell into heaven,
Some of them fell into hell.*

Remus liked a lot of things about Grant. His smile, his corkscrew blond curls, his brash, unapologetic sense of humour. Grant was a likeable person. But there was one thing Remus absolutely refused to tolerate.

Grant loved football. He wasn't a fanatic, but he definitely had more of an interest than Remus really felt was necessary. He supported Queens Park Rangers - and even bought himself a knock-off kit t-shirt one year, plus the blue and white striped scarf. Never one to simply observe, Grant was an occasional gambler too, and on Saturdays he played on a gay men's team away down in South London.

That was how he met Neil Newman - a tall, good looking football player with spiky hair and thighs you could crack walnuts on - and how Remus met Anthea Luong; Neil's part-time girlfriend.

"Part-time?!" Remus raised an eyebrow when Grant explained. He was tying up his boot laces, ready to go for practice one Saturday and Neil was coming to pick him up.

"It's not that unusual," Grant winked at him, Remus took the point.

"But if Neil's *queer* --" Remus tried. Grant lifted a finger,

"Get with the times, sunshine - queer's out. We are Gay Men, and we are proud."

Remus rolled his eyes, "Whatever. If Neil's *a Gay Man*, then how does Anthea fit in?"

"I reckon he must be bicentennial."

"You mean bisexual." Remus corrected.

"No, he's two hundred years old," Grant poked his tongue out. "Yes, Mr Literal, *bisexual*."

Remus couldn't really blame Neil for that, once he'd met her too. Anthea was a very attractive girl. She was tiny and springy, with long satin black hair and glittering eyes. Her mouth was like a rosebud, and she had the most beautiful skin Remus had ever seen. She dressed like Cindy Lauper, all frills and dayglo.

"*So* nice to meet you," she grinned, stretching up on her tiptoes to kiss Remus's cheek in greeting. Neil just gave him a slightly wary nod - Remus was used to that, from Grant's paramours.

"Tea, everybody?" Grant offered.

"Nah, we'd better get going." Neil said, rather pointedly, Remus thought. "Want to get there early, don't we? Warm up."

"Is that what you call it?" Anthea stuck her tongue out at him. "Remus, can I stay here with you? I've got *so much* I want to talk to you about."

"You have?!" He stared at her, alarmed. He hadn't even known Neil had a girlfriend until ten minutes ago.

"Oh yeah, I told Anth here how good you are at astrology." Grant said cheerfully, pulling his denim jacket on. It looked silly, in shorts and long socks, but everything football related was ridiculous to Remus.

"Astro *nomy* ." Remus said, "Very different things..."

"S'all stars and that, innit?"

"Well..." he didn't really have an argument.

"See you lads! Have fun!" Anthea waved at them both, pushing them out of the door. Suddenly Remus was alone with a strange young woman, with no idea why. He really wanted a drink.

"You don't have a TV." She said, flatly.

"No." Remus agreed.

"Great flat, though!" She was saying, walking around the room, looking out of the window, pulling books off the shelf and scanning the covers, "So nice you live in Chinatown - do you speak chinese?"

"Er... no...?"

"I do, I speak three languages, actually, Chinese, Vietnamese and English. English is my mother tongue, Vietnamese is my mother's tongue, if you get me." she winked at him, "And *Neil* always says I ought to say I speak four languages, because I chat so much shit." She laughed - it was a bit of an ugly, jangly laugh, like coins falling on sheet metal, but she laughed with such conviction that it was endearing anyway.

"Right." Remus nodded. "Er... sorry, did you want to know something about astronomy?"

“Maybe. I’m a Virgo, what are you?”

“Uhh... Pisces, I think?”

“Do they go together?” She asked. He blinked,

“No. I mean, I don’t know. I mean... like I said, that’s really astrology, not--”

“Neil’s a capricorn, and they *don’t* go with virgos, I checked. I always check. But, y’know, the heart wants what it wants. You know they’re shagging?” she said, out of nowhere, “Him and Grant?”

“I guessed...”

“Do you mind it? You’re Grant’s live in, aren’t you?”

Remus nodded, though he privately corrected her - Grant was *his* live in, not the other way around. “We’re pretty casual, though.”

“Oh that’s good,” she nodded, earnestly.

“Look, um... how long are you staying?” Remus scratched his head awkwardly.

“Just til the boys get back from footie,” she smiled, “That’s ok, isn’t it? Grant said you’d like the company. Ooh, I tell you what, I’d love a cup of tea.”

“Um. Ok...” He went to put the kettle on, still confused. What was Grant playing at, leaving him to babysit his lover’s girlfriend?! As if Remus had nothing better to do on a Saturday. He’d planned to read the paper. Maybe catch up with the Archers on the radio.

“No sugar, no milk!” Anthea called. “Oooh, can I put a record on?”

“If you like...”

She put on a Queen album. Remus sighed to himself. He wasn’t a fan, really, but Grant couldn’t get enough.

When he brought the tea through, Anthea was sitting on the couch, leaning over the coffee table rolling a joint. She grinned at him, “Fancy it?”

“Go on then,” Remus agreed. Well, that was better than nothing.

They smoked and drank tea and listened to Queen, and Anthea rabbited on, asking all sorts.

“Grant says you’re really clever, private school and everything.”

“Yeah.” Remus shrugged.

“And you know all about constellations, and things like that. Hey, I can read your tarot cards, if you like?”

“No thanks.”

“How come you’ve got all those scars?”

He blinked, caught off guard. She was still smiling prettily, and seemed genuinely curious about

him.

“Just got a lot of scars.” He said, swallowing. “Do you fancy a gin and tonic?” He didn’t actually have tonic, but he could pretend he’d just forgotten and take it neat.

“Yeah, why not,” she nodded brightly. He got up, and she followed him into the kitchen, still talking, “You’re not ill or anything, then?”

“No.” Remus said. “I got them fighting. Some of them I did myself.”

“Oh you poor thing.” She said, her sympathy genuine. She leaned forward and squeezed his arm kindly. “Sorry to ask, love, you just can’t be too careful, nowadays, do you know what I mean?”

“Mm.” He poured the gin into two tumblers. He did know exactly what she meant, and he didn’t want to talk about it. Or think about it.

She didn’t complain when he handed her a tumbler of straight gin, just clicked their glasses together and beamed, “Cheers!” then took a good gulp.

They went back to the couch. Remus took the bottle.

“You’re ever so tall, Remus. What are you, six three?”

“Six two.”

“I love tall men.” She purred.

“Me too.”

Anthea laughed again at that, her plastic earrings clicking together. She chatted even more, telling him silly, nonsense things about herself; where she’d been to school, her favourite songs on the radio, every film she’d ever seen at the pictures. “And I love a bit of dancing, too, that’s how I met Neil, dancing down in Vauxhall. Shall I show you? Ok, you have to picture me in this sparkly purple dress, right? And my hair was shorter then.”

She got up and began to dance to the record.

Ooh love,

Ooh loverboy

What’re you doin’ tonight, hey boy

Set my alarm, turn on my charm

That’s because I’m a good old-fashioned lover boy

Remus didn’t need to picture the sparkly dress; she was a very good dancer. She twisted and wriggled with sensual energy, throwing flirtatious looks at him and flicking her hips. Stoned and relaxed, Remus slouched on the sofa watching her. She was dream like, pretty and graceful, but also overwhelmingly and unignorable *real*. Remus wondered why he always ended up stuck with chatterboxes, and why on earth he liked it so much.

The song ended, and she held her arms aloft like a gymnast who had just completed a perfect routine. Remus smiled, despited himself, and applauded.

“Fancy a dance?” She fluttered her eyelashes flirtatiously. Remus couldn’t help it; whatever she had rolled him was stronger than he was used to, and he was charmed by her.

“Go on, then.”

He didn’t really dance, but he held her hands as she did, twirling her in the right places, and letting her fall into his arms, giggling. She had the most delicate wrists, the bones fine like a bird's.

When they finally collapsed on the couch to smoke another joint, she kicked off her shoes and laid her legs over his lap. Grant did that sometimes; they only had the one sofa, so it was the only way to stretch out.

“You’re very handsome, Remus.” She said through the smoke.

“Ha.” He replied, knocking back the last of his gin. He couldn’t pour any more without pushing her legs off, and he didn’t want to do that, so he settled for the joint.

“You *are* . You’re very sexy.”

“Shh.” He chuckled. “Who do you think you are? Showing up in my flat unannounced and interrogating me.”

“Am I interrogating you?” She widened her eyes, “Are you succumbing to my techniques?”

Remus laughed, creasing over, his hands on her legs - they were so smooth and soft. She was giggling too, watching him. Her eyes were so dark and so full of life. He wanted her. Remus realised it all of a sudden, like a light being turned on - the room was brighter, her face clearer. *Bloody hell.*

He finished the joint. She wriggled down on the couch and closed her eyes contentedly. He left his hands on her legs - just resting there, he didn’t want to grab her or anything awful like that. He just wanted... what? What did you do with a girl? Mary was almost a decade ago, and it wasn’t as if Remus had really played much of a role there. He’d mostly just felt surprised she had picked him.

He felt like that now, too, as Anthea opened her eyes and smiled at him again.

“Sorry, did you want to lie down too?”

“What?” Remus’s back prickled, alarmed. We're they *really* going to?! “No! I mean... er...”

“You’re so lovely,” she grinned, shifting aside and pulling him down beside her, “Let’s just lie together for a bit, it's nice, isn’t it?”

“Mm...”

She put her arm across him. Her soft black hair tickled under his nose, and he couldn’t help but inhale her scent. It was warm and sort of spicy, like clove or cinnamon. He liked it. They lay for a bit, like that. The record had finished, and was just turning on its needle, crackling.

“What do you think Neil and Grant are doing now?” Anthea whispered, her hand suddenly on his belt, palm flat against his crotch. “Probably in the showers, do you reckon?”

“Um.” Remus said, speechless.

“You ought to see Neil with his kit off, he’s an Adonis. I mean, he’s a dickhead, but you can forget all about it when he gets going - I bet they’re all sweaty, and muddy from the pitch.”

Remus tried to regulate his breathing, but she kept moving her hand, and he was finding it hard to concentrate on anything else. Finally she looked up at him, and kissed his lips very tenderly. "Do you fancy it?"

"Yeah," Remus breathed, "Go on, then."

Anthea was in the shower, two hours later, when Grant and Neil walked in the door. Remus was still sprawled on the couch in his underpants, flushed and completely stunned.

Grant did a double take, and then burst out laughing. Neil looked appalled. He marched into the bathroom and demanded Anthea get out at once.

"You slag!" Grant wheezed at Remus, doubled over laughing.

"Bye Grant, bye Remus!" Anthea called as she and Neil hurried out. He had a face like thunder, and the door slammed hard behind them.

"Well then." Grant said, composing himself. "I hope your girlfriend hasn't used up all the hot water."

"I really don't know why that happened." Remus said, pulling his t-shirt on. "We were just listening to records, and she was talking, and then..."

"What, it was the only way to shut her up?"

Remus looked up at him sheepishly, "Believe it or not, it didn't shut her up."

It took Grant almost ten full minutes to pull himself together.

* * *

They got a TV, a few weeks after that - Grant joked that if Remus was so bored he'd resorted to shagging girls, then they'd better bring in some entertainment for him. He didn't see Anthea again, which was a pity, because to be honest, Remus wouldn't have minded making that a regular thing. Once you got used to all the talking, she was very sexy. He didn't think about what it meant too much, and Grant didn't push it.

The TV came second hand - neither of them had enough disposable income for a brand new one. They got it free off a friend of Grant's, on the condition that they picked it up themselves. It was only two streets over, but that still presented something of a problem.

"Can't you... hover it home, or something?" Grant asked, hands on his hips as they stared down at the big, bulky TV set on the pavement. "Do a spell."

"It's against the law." Remus explained. "In public, anyway. Or in front of mugg--you."

"Pfft." Grant raised a hand to push his hair out of his sweaty face. "Bugger. Knew I ought to learn how to drive."

The door of the building opened, and a man walked out, looking flushed and shifty. That was the third man Remus had seen with exactly the same furtive look.

"What is this place, anyway?!" He asked, peering up at the building. It looked like all the others - maybe a bit shabby. There was no outward signage.

"Sauna," Grant said, squatting down to see if he could get his arms around the set. He could, but

there was no way he could lift the thing.

“Sauna?” Remus scratched his head.

“You know, a bath house. Where men can be alone together and get all sweaty.”

“Oh!” Remus gaped, embarrassed.

“Christ Remus, we do live in Soho.”

“I know! I just... anyway, don’t lift it like that, you’ll do your back in. Come on, take that end, I’ll take this... one, two, three, up...”

They got it back in about thirty minutes, only taking one break. Remus was really doing most of the carrying, but he didn’t mind; they’d picked a day between the moons and he was feeling pretty healthy.

Luckily, Grant was a dab hand at the electrical side, and managed to hook everything up once the TV was actually in the living room. It looked weird; a big black plastic cube, taking up all the space. They ended up putting it on a box in front of the fireplace, which they never used anyway. The aerial wasn’t brilliant, and needed a bit of electrical tape to keep it upright, but once they switched the thing on, and the fuzzy picture came into view, they were both hooked.

Remus, who hadn’t watched any telly in years, was a complete addict that summer. He got hooked on soaps - EastEnders, Brookside and Coronation Street, but he’d watch anything; debates in the house of commons, snooker championships, comedy, documentaries, top of the tops, and even a horrifically upsetting series called *Threads* , about the threat of nuclear war.

The TV went on first thing in the morning as he pottered around the flat getting dressed or brushing his teeth, and more often than not he fell asleep in front of it in the evenings. Grant started calling the set ‘the other man’.

“I just like the noise,” Remus said, “For company.”

“You could try making some real friends...” Grant suggested. Remus dismissed this. He didn’t need friends; he had everything he needed.

One Sunday afternoon they were both in the living room. Remus had to leave for a cleaning job which started at 3am, so he had been sleeping most of the day. Grant was reading the paper, and Remus’s legs were across his lap. With his free hand, Grant was absent-mindedly rubbing the arch of Remus’s left foot, which was making Remus sleepy and dozy again.

The News had just finished, and they were waiting for the weather when suddenly, sinister music began playing.

" *There is now a danger that has become a threat to us all ,*" the television said ominously. " *It is a deadly disease and there is no known cure...*"

Grant and Remus both looked up to watch the creepy announcement. A word etched onto a blackened gravestone - AIDS.

" *Don't die of ignorance !*" The voiceover intoned.

A familiar sense of shame and anxiety rushed through Remus, a sickly mix of emotion he hadn’t felt since school. He pulled his feet off Grant, drawing his knees up to his chest. He felt dirty;

untouchable.

“Christ.” Grant said, his voice hollow, signalling to Remus that he was feeling exactly the same way. “S' enough to make ya give up on shagging altogether, innit.” He shook his head.

Remus bit his lip.

"*You're* being safe, aren't you?" He asked tentatively.

"Yeah, obviously." Grant nodded, brusquely.

Remus looked up at him, twisting his mouth. He hated bringing up Grant's other liaisons, and Grant was always very discreet about it. Not guilty, or secretive, but discreet. Still, Remus wanted to be as sure as he could.

"Good. I mean, you're using..."

Grant stood up, hands on his hips, clearly annoyed.

"Yes, Remus, when I fuck other men I make sure there are condoms handy."

"Sorry." Remus blushed, looking down at his hands. "It's none of my business."

"Right. It's not." Grant snapped, agitated, and went into the kitchen.

Remus heard him fill the kettle and then flick it on, then he smelled cigarette smoke. He ran his fingers through his hair, flustered, and called through the wall;

"I just... you know I couldn't bear it, if I didn't have you."

Quiet. Footsteps.

“What about you?” Grant asked, reappearing.

“Me?!” Remus blinked.

Grant folded his arms, leaning in the doorframe.

“Don’t treat me like an idiot, I know I’m not your one and only. And it wasn’t just Anth, neither. Whoever you see, when you go off every month. When you’re... when you’re not yourself.”

Remus stared at him, his mouth dry. He blinked again, and nodded.

“I’ll be safe.”

“Couldn’t do without you either.” Grant said, ruffling Remus’s hair. “Insensitive wanker. Cup of tea?”

Remus nodded, glad they weren’t fighting, but troubled all the same. Grant was quite right, of course. Remus had never given protection a second thought with Castor. Could wizards get it? If they could, then was there a magical cure? Remus had seen pictures of AIDs sufferers from America; skeletal men in hospital beds. He shuddered.

Grant came back through with two cups of tea. He handed one to Remus, then sat down beside him, crossed his legs and raised the mug to his lips, blowing on it. He sipped, and then looked up, thoughtfully. “I could stop.”

“Eh?” Remus blinked, lost in his own thoughts.

“I could stop seeing other people.” Grant repeated patiently. “If you wanted me to, I mean. All you have to do is ask.”

“I don’t want to tell you what you can and can’t--”

“Remus.” Grant raised an eyebrow, “I’ve been living here for four years. You’re a right dickhead sometimes, but you make me happy.”

Remus was staring at the carpet, now, trying not to panic.

Grant set down his tea, and reached over to touch Remus’s hand, “I don’t need anyone but you.” He said, sincerely.

“Grant, I...”

“I know, I know,” Grant put a hand up, “I’m not expecting you to say it back, it’s ok. I know how you feel, and that’s enough.”

Remus inhaled sharply and closed his eyes. He exhaled slowly, and willed his heart to slow down. It was a lovely thing to hear. He had never for a moment expected to feel this way again - or for it to be so very different from the last time.

“Ok.” He breathed.

“Ok?” Grant cocked his head.

“Ok,” Remus nodded, “I’d rather you didn’t see anyone else.”

“Deal.”

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'A Rainy Night in Soho' by The Pogues.

Song midway through is 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy' by Queen.

- Yes, British people really do drink that much tea. It's not simply a hot beverage to us, it punctuates a moment.

- The 'Don't Die of Ignorance' advert was real. (If you go looking for it, please be mindful in the comments - millions of people have died and are still dying today from this terrible illness. Always be respectful.)

Chapter Summary

Communication problems?! Remus?? Pfft. Dunno what you're on about, tbh.

CONTENT WARNING - Remus actually attempts to address the War and his feelings about Sirius in this chapter. And he's kind of a dick about the whole thing. Also brief mention of physical abuse/battery.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Time up and time out for all the liberties you've taken

Time up and time out for all the friends that you've forsaken

And if you choose to waste away like death is back in fashion

You're an accident waiting to happen

My sins are so unoriginal.

I have all the self loathing of a wolf in sheep's clothing

In this carnival of carnivores, heaven help me.

Goodbye and good luck to all the promises you've broken

Goodbye and good luck to all the rubbish that you've spoken

Your life has lost its dignity, its beauty and its passion

You're an accident waiting to happen

Things were different, of course, after Remus and Grant agreed to remain monogamous. They were still best friends, they still made each other laugh and irritated each other beyond belief, but a fresh new closeness had developed too. Remus drank less for a while - he didn't stop altogether, and some days were very hard, some days he didn't wash, or get out of bed, or eat. But not every day; and that was progress.

Castor didn't take it well. In fact, he was furious. Remus even tried to explain HIV to him, but it was no good. Castor had grown so far away from humanity, he was even starting to look wolfish. His hair was thicker, blacker somehow, and extended down past the nape of his neck, creeping along his spine. His teeth were lengthening, his eyes sharper, the irises turning yellow.

“You are turning your back on your family, Remus Lupin.” He snarled. “Even your magic grows weaker.”

“I’m not turning my back on anything.” Remus insisted, “I’m trying to have a real life.”

Of course Castor didn’t understand; Remus kept Castor and Grant so separate that they didn’t even know each others’ names. Maybe he’d always known he’d have to pick one of them in the end. And Castor had never felt right.

In the end, Remus was banished from the pack. He was warned that if he ever returned, he would be treated as a threat. This was extreme, but he supposed that’s just what you got for breaking a werewolf’s heart.

Now Remus had to spend the full moons in Britain. He returned to some of his old haunts; the Lake District, the Brecon Beacons. He tried not to go anywhere there were too many memories of Prongs and Wormtail. Or the other one. To make matters worse, without the pack to help him heal every month, Remus had to apparate back to London and tend to his wounds as best he could.

“Christ!” Grant exclaimed, the first time it was really bad. He walked in on Remus in the bathroom, disinfecting his cuts, his wand shaking as he tried to grip it with broken fingers.

“Sorry,” Remus murmured, bracing himself against the sink as a dizzy spell threatened to overwhelm him. He hadn’t felt so dreadful after a transformation since... since... his vision clouded, and he sat down on the closed toilet lid, head between his knees so he didn’t faint.

“Christ!” Grant said again, coming in and kneeling in front of him. He took the bloody cotton ball Remus had been using, and tossed it in the bin. He grabbed the tub from the side of the sink, plus the bottle of TCP. “Come here, you,” he said softly, taking Remus’s hand very gently in his, and dabbing it lightly with the disinfectant.

Remus sat there dumbly, letting himself be looked after, too tired to do much else.

“For god’s sake,” Grant shook his head, visibly upset, “We can’t have you in this state every month, can we my darling?”

“It’s ok.” Remus mumbled, “This isn’t too bad.”

“My arse!” Grant retorted, getting up to look for plasters in the medicine cabinet. He found them and knelt down again, resuming his work on Remus’s scrapes. “Tell you what, if it’s a choice between you coming back like this every month or giving that wolfy fucker a few blowjobs then I’ll do it myself.”

Remus laughed, which hurt his ribs. “I’m not sure it works like that.”

“Well, we’ve got to do something.” Grant grumbled, binding Remus’s broken fingers tightly together with the plasters.

“You’re good at this,” Remus said, surprised, looking down at the neat work Grant had made.

“Yeah, well, if you get battered as much as I’ve been, you pick up some tricks,” Grant looked up and winked. “And don’t forget I went on that first aid course for work. Come on then, let’s get you to bed. Are you hungry?”

“Sort of.” He was starving, but he knew there was no food in. They were waiting for payday to do a big shop.

"I'll see what I can do." Grant said, helping him through to the bedroom.

"You don't have to, I'll probably just sleep."

"God, you look so pale," Grant felt Remus's forehead with the back of his hand. "I fink you ought to eat something."

"Honestly, I look worse than I feel." Remus climbed into bed, his bones wept with relief.

"Don't believe you." Grant got in with him, and sat up, stroking Remus's hair. It was very soothing. "Did... did Sirius used to look after you? After full moons?"

Remus screwed his eyes up, shook his head, "Please don't. I can't."

"Oh love." Grant sighed, resuming his tender stroking. "You know, my friend who does the counselling, she says she'll still give you an appointment. Just say the word. Helped me a lot, you don't know how much."

"I can't." Remus said. He always said the same. "There are too many lies I'd have to tell."

"Nah, I've been thinking - it doesn't have to be about the war, or even the wolf thing. Just talk to her about James and Lily and Peter. Say it was a car crash, or--"

"No."

"Remus, I just want you to talk--"

"You know, I really don't feel well. Can you leave me alone, please?"

"Fine." Grant got up. Remus kept his eyes shut, but he could hear every movement. Just before he left the room, Grant turned back. "I found that bottle of gin in your sock drawer, by the way. Poured it down the sink."

He slammed the door.

* * *

Ring ring* *Ring ring

"Hello?"

"Mary?"

"Remus?" There was a brief silence on the end of the line, as Mary collected herself. Remus knew that feeling. Sometimes he'd be reminded something from the old days, and it would knock all the air out of him. "Hi!" She said, her voice carrying an overwide smile. "How are you, sweetheart?"

"Oh, you know. I'm not disturbing you?" He always tried to give her an easy out, if she wanted it.

"Of course not... Just had our tea."

"Oh nice, what did you have?"

"Chicken and rice. Darren's favourite."

"Sounds good."

"You ought to come for dinner, one evening. Still in London, are you?"

"Yeah... same flat."

"Oh, of course. Is that...? Um. How is that?"

"It's ok." He said, glancing around at his shabby living room. "Been here so long now I s'pose it feels like it's always been just mine."

"Seeing anyone?"

"Sort of."

"Working?"

"Cleaning. Off and on, when I can get it. I was stacking shelves for a bit, over in Epping, but I fell asleep on the job and they sacked me."

"Be gentle with yourself, love."

"Yeah." He took a drink from his beer bottle. "How's your job?"

"Good! Turns out I might have been awful at transfiguration, but accounting is no big deal."

Darren had opened a garage in late '85, and Mary worked there too, taking care of all the bookings and the invoicing. They were saving up to move out of their tower block, and get a little house with a garden. She only used magic very occasionally, she told Remus, though her relationship with her wand had never been quite the same since finding the McKinnons.

"Remus? Are you still there?"

"Sorry, yeah. Drifted off."

"I do that too..." a pause, and Remus got that sick, tight feeling in his stomach. He could guess what was coming next. Mary raised her voice, slightly, "Have you got someone to talk to? Whoever it is you're 'sort of' seeing, do they know what happened?"

"Mm." Remus made a noncommittal noise. "Bits and pieces."

"Because you ought to talk about it, Remus. You shouldn't have to carry all of that... I can't imagine how it must feel, the betrayal--"

"No." Remus snapped, "You can't!" and he slammed down the phone, as hard as he could, so that he knocked it off the table. He finished his beer before moving to pick it up.

Fuck her, then.

Everyone wanted him to talk, but none of them *really* knew. None of them *could* know - how stupid he felt, how used. Lily and James and Peter and Marlene - losing them was one thing. Remus had taught himself to focus on the best memories, the happiest times.

But Sirius. There was not one moment of their time together that wasn't tainted; poisoned by the lies Black had been telling. Remus had been open, and vulnerable and loving, and every moment of it had been false.

He had been made a fool of by the only person he had ever loved. He was *pathetic* ; too blinded by

emotion to see the truth, and now there was nothing left of him. He would never be capable of that kind of softness ever again. Remus's hatred for Sirius was so overwhelming sometimes it frightened him.

So how was he supposed to talk about that? How was he supposed to tell Grant, or some therapist, that he was not merely angry, not merely grieving, but *paralysed* by rage? That he sometimes dreamed about getting to Azkaban somehow, and killing Sirius himself. That once or twice in the first few months after the war, he had gone so far as to actually get up in the night, drunk and furious, grabbed his wand, and planned to do exactly that. The only thing that stopped him was the thought of getting splinched, or having to face all those dementors.

He kicked the coffee table, furiously, stubbing his toe.

"Bugger!"

Grant poked his head around the corner of the living room door. "Didn't go well, then?"

"There's no point trying." Remus huffed, rubbing his foot and hopping across the room to flick on the t.v. "She's happy. She's got her life together. I should just leave her to it." He collapsed back into the sofa.

"Is that what she said?" Grant came in, reproachfully.

"No. But it's what's fair." Remus kept his eyes fixed on the screen, slouching down further. Maybe Grant would get the message: *I don't want to talk!*

"Why don't you invite her over one saturday?" Grant sat on the arm of the couch. "I'd like to meet her."

"No point. She wouldn't come. Too many memories here."

"We could go out then, go for lunch somewhere nice."

"We can't afford that."

Grant rubbed his temples, wincing as if he was getting a headache, "You're being childish." He said.

"Piss off."

"Brilliant rebuttal, that," Grant snorted, "Come on, what happened to the clever clogs I used to fancy the pants off? Use your big words."

"Look, you wanted me to call Mary and I did. It ended badly, like I knew it would, and that's that. Just leave me alone, will you?!"

"Yeah, I can imagine exactly *why* it ended badly, too, and I don't need to be a bloody magician to work it out."

"Wizard."

"Dickhead. From what you've told me she's a nice girl. And she knows you. I just thought she'd be someone to talk to about--"

"Yeah, well, *she* doesn't want to talk about it any more than I do." Remus spat. "She told me to talk to *you*."

“She did?” Grant blinked. Remus felt especially cruel.

“Well. Obviously she doesn’t know you by name. Just whoever I’m shagging, right now.”

“Right.” Grant made an obvious effort to ignore this slight. “Well, come on then.”

“What?”

“It’s a Sunday, I’ve got nothing to do. Let’s talk.”

“No.”

“Remus. I can’t go on like this.” Grant said. “I love you, I do, but this is too---”

Fuck. Alarm bells started going off inside Remus’s head.

It was as if someone had started flashing the lights on and off, and the walls were closing in, and all the air had left the room, and he was dizzy, drowning, blinded. There was a weird taste in his mouth, and he thought he might be sick, except he couldn’t breathe enough to retch, just kept gasping, tumbling forward.

“Hey, hey hey!” Grant’s voice penetrated the fog, echoing and distant. “Remus? Remus, can you take a deep breath? In on one, out on two, ok? One...”

Remus felt sweat trickle down his back, his heart thudding into overdrive, but he breathed in, as much as he could. “Two...” Grant said. He was rubbing his back very slowly. Remus let out a long shaky breath. “That’s so good,” Grant said, voice louder now, “So good, Remus, well done. And again, one... two...”

They must have sat there for almost two full minutes, just breathing together. Eventually, Remus felt halfway normal again. Except he really, really wanted a drink.

“See,” Grant said, using the voice that Remus was sure he reserved for the troubled kids he worked with, “This is why I need you to talk to me. We can’t have this, can we?”

Remus shook his head, but didn’t trust himself to speak.

“I’m sorry I said what I said,” Grant continued, “I didn’t mean it. There’s no ‘buts’, ok? I love you, and you’re stuck with me.”

Remus nodded again, head still in his hands, eyes shut tight. He had to be getting the flu, or something; people didn’t get dizzy just from *not talking*, surely. Only... only Grant saying that; ‘I can’t go on...’ it had ignited such dread inside him, such terror, maybe there was something to it.

“What if you tell me just one thing?” Grant tried, “Just one thing to help me understand?”

“Like what?” Remus choked.

“Well...” he could practically hear Grant’s mind whirring. Did he have a list of things he wanted to pry out of Remus, all saved up for just this occasion? Was this some stupid psychoanalysis bullshit Grant had picked up on a training course?

“You’ve never told me what happened to Sirius. I know he’s not dead. Did he... leave?”

“Yeah, in a manner of speaking.” Remus grunted. God, hearing someone else say his name hurt so much. He felt dizzy all over again.

“What do you mean?”

“He’s in prison.” Remus said. Then he breathed in again, and forced out the rest. “He’s in prison because he murdered them, and I wasn’t here to stop any of it.”

“Fucking hell.”

“Mm.” Remus braced himself for more questions. But none came. Grant just slipped his arm over his shoulder and gave him a squeeze,

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“You don’t know that.” Remus returned, still looking down. “You don’t know how stupid I was. I missed all the signs. I *knew* something was wrong, but I thought... I thought it was just me; I thought he wanted to break up. I was so selfish, I never thought for a second that he would... that he *could*...” He was crying now. *Stupid Grant.*

“It’s his fault for letting you down, not *your* fault for trusting him.” Grant kept hugging him. Remus allowed it, to make him feel better; to make this seem like a breakthrough.

But Grant could say that all he wanted - Mary had said something similar, once or twice over the years. It just didn’t ring true. The dead were still dead, and Remus had not been there to prevent any of it. Even if he had been there, that Halloween night; the way he’d been back then, he probably would have let Sirius kill him, too, rather than try to fight him.

Back then, dying for love had seemed the only worthy cause. But he was older, now, and he knew the truth. Never again. Never, never.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Accident Waiting to Happen' by Billy Bragg.

I am trying to limit the amount of Bragg I use in this fic, but tbh it's a losing battle, he's too good a songwriter and everything he sings fits Grant/Remus in the 80s lol.

Chapter Summary

Remus bumps into an old face.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When I look back upon my life

It's always with a sense of shame

I've always been the one to blame

For everything I long to do

No matter when or where or who

Has one thing in common, too;

It's a, it's a, it's a, it's a sin

It's a sin

In the spring on 1987, Remus had a spot of luck. One of Grant's old student friends now worked in the Law Department at UCL and managed to swing a job for Remus doing some freelance editing. This was a revelation; he could do the bulk of it at home, and then just take it up to Holborn once it was done. He did need to get a national insurance card, and a muggle bank account, but that was easy enough with a few tactical glamour spells at the bank.

Remus only cheated a little bit, using magic to help him read and correct spelling, but he found the work surprisingly enjoyable, and even started a little business marking exam papers for some of the local muggle schools.

"Dunno how you can concentrate so long." Grant shook his head at the pile of papers Remus had amassed one evening. "I'd go out of my mind."

"It's interesting," Remus shrugged, "I never got the chance to learn any of this stuff. Have you heard of quadratic equations?"

Grant laughed at him fondly and ruffled his hair, "You boffin."

Grant himself had been going from strength to strength at work. He loved his job, and put in extra time on the weekends and evenings whenever he could. The boys Grant worked with were every bit as much trouble as the St Edmund's boys, but that only seemed to spur Grant on. He was always telling Remus about one kid or another who'd had a little victory - a passing mark at school, a

week without a fight, time off their sentence. Somehow Grant knew everything about everyone; his memory limitless, his capacity for pride and encouragement unbelievable.

“Got to cut out that article in the Observer,” he might say one evening, “Sounds right up Alfie’s street.” Or, “Staying late tomorrow, with any luck - promised the older lads we’d have a kick-about if none of them get written up.”

When he was feeling insecure sometimes Remus would wonder if Grant was only with him because he too was a troubled boy. That Grant was just trying to save him; like he tried to save everybody. He lived for a good cause.

“Shut up,” Grant would grin at him, if he raised these concerns. “I’ve wanted to get in your pants since we were teenagers, it’s got nothing to do with your tortured past.”

And then Remus would remember that after all, Grant was a care home kid himself. Something which was easy to forget, because unlike Remus, he bore it lightly, with a casual shrug of acceptance. Poverty, lack of education, mistreatment - none of this weighed Grant down in the same way. At least not on the surface. But Remus had been wrong about people before.

As a result of Grant’s dedication to his work, and Remus’s own relatively low impact employment, Remus found himself in a position he had never been in before - having both free time and a bit of disposable income.

He didn’t need much - the flat was paid for, their furniture was serviceable, and they could generally afford to keep the electric and hot water on. He bought clothes every once in a while, but he hardly shopped at Harrods. There was the drink, but he reasoned that as he didn’t smoke any more, he could put his tobacco money towards booze.

What Remus did enjoy doing was going for walks. Not countryside rambles - he got enough of that on full moons - but wandering through London by himself, enjoying the streets, the people. He visited every free museum in London - the National Gallery, the Portrait Gallery, the V&A, the British Museum. He became quite cultured, in fact. And if his hip hurt (which it often did, now, as he entered his late twenties), he could easily hop on a bus.

So, one summer’s day, he had completed all of his marking, and there was nothing on TV, Grant would not be home for hours, so he mooched around the Science Museum for an hour or so. Funnily enough, it put him in mind of Arthur Weasley, for the first time in years. The daft old bugger would love all of the machines, the pistons, the lightbulbs. He could just picture Arthur’s face as he watched the perpetual motion machine, and Remus smiled to himself, quite out of the blue. How was Arthur? And his wife, the Prewetts’ sister, and their redhaired brood? It had been too long now to get in touch, Remus knew, and he wouldn’t know what to say, even if he did.

Still, thinking about the Weasleys hadn’t hurt, which was the main thing. And perhaps thinking about them put him in a different mindframe for the afternoon - more alert, maybe, or nostalgic. It couldn’t be a coincidence that he bumped into an old friend only two hours later.

He was nearly home, only a street or so away, shuffling anonymously through the bustling Chinatown alleyways. In fact, he was just about to pass the place they’d got their tv - the sauna off Old Compton Street. Remus always blushed a bit, walking past it, and then chastised himself for being such a prude. He ducked his head slightly, as he approached, and - horror of horrors - just as he was level with the door somebody stepped out of it.

Remus had to stop short, so as not to bump into them. They turned and stared up at him, nervously.

Remus gasped. "Christopher!"

The man blinked, horrified. He was red faced with dark brown eyes that were rather small and watery. He was a bit chubbier than he had been at school, and his hairline was receding slightly at the temples. But it was definitely him.

"Remus?"

"Hi! It's been..."

"Not since..."

"Yeah. How are you?" Remus winced even as he asked the question. Christopher was so clearly uncomfortable - and why shouldn't he be? He hadn't seen Remus in almost ten years, and now here he was, looming over him outside a gay sauna.

"Oh... you know." Christopher looked at his feet.

He was wearing muggle clothes - a stonewashed denim shirt with the buttons done up unevenly, dress trousers and a burnt orange waistcoat with green embroidery. In short, he looked as dreadful as every pureblood wizard who tried to pass as a muggle. As always, Christopher's general air of hopelessness endeared Remus to him.

"Er..." Remus rubbed the back of his head. "Do you want to... um. Got time for a coffee? Or a drink? Catch up a bit?"

"Ok then..." Christopher looked up at him, cautiously.

Remus took charge from that point, because it was clear there was no other way. He led Christopher further up the street, back towards Tottenham Court Road. There was a cafe on Denmark Street that was cheap and anonymous, and for some reason Remus wanted to get further away from home.

"Here we are," he smiled kindly, holding the door open and pointing out an available table. Christopher said nothing, and sat down, fidgeting a bit. Remus wondered if this was all a terrible idea - maybe Chris didn't want to speak to him. But he went along with it, and offered to pay when Remus went to order their coffees.

"Do you live nearby?" Christopher asked, finally, still not fully making eye contact.

"Yeah," Remus nodded, "Not far. You?"

"Oh, no. Out in Hampshire. I just come into the city for work, and... well."

"Where do you work now?" Remus asked, desperate to spare him any further embarrassment.

"Gringotts." Chris said, glancing up at the waitress as their coffees arrived. He put three sugars in his, and as much milk as he could - Remus realised he hadn't even asked if Chris *liked* coffee.

"Very swish," Remus smiled, "Always knew you'd do well."

"I suppose."

"Still read lots?"

"When there's time... work keeps me busy. And other responsibilities, you know how it is. I

thought we were overworked during NEWTs, but Hogwarts was a holiday compared to real life.”

Remus chewed the inside of his cheek, because that was very true, and he didn’t want to get upset about it.

“How about you?” Christopher asked, clearly trying not to grimace as he sipped his coffee. “What do you do, now?”

“This and that,” Remus shrugged. “Haven’t exactly got a career.”

“Oh, what a shame.”

Remus shrugged, “It’s fine, I manage.”

There was an awkward silence. Remus wanted to ask about the sauna, but he knew better. Grant would probably ask, but then Grant had a way of putting people at ease which Remus didn’t. He just drank his coffee quietly, and wished he’d suggested a pub, instead.

“I thought you’d died.” Christopher said, suddenly. Remus nearly choked. He set down his coffee.

“You...”

“There were so many rumours, back then - you remember what it was like. And there were all these names, and when I saw what had happened to Lily, and your friend James, I just thought... especially after it came out that Sirius Black was the one who did it, I just assumed...”

Remus breathed in, sharply, and waited for the pain to retreat. When it did, he exhaled slowly, and said, very evenly,

“No. I wasn’t there, that night. I had no idea what Black was up to. No one did.”

“He was always up to something,” Christopher said, darkly. “And with his family... I suppose it didn’t come as much of a surprise, really.”

“No.” Remus said, not really knowing what he was saying anymore, just trying to ignore the roaring in his head, “I suppose not.”

“I was so upset about Lily, though. She was kind. Do you know where Harry is, now? The boy who lived?”

Remus just shook his head. He drank more coffee - probably not a brilliant idea to add caffeine to his already speeding heart rate, but he was trying to be as normal as possible.

“If you weren’t dead,” Christopher continued, “I thought you might just not want to talk to me.”

“Why?”

“I know you and your friends were all involved in the war - helping Dumbledore and everything. I didn’t... my parents sent me to Sweden, after I finished my NEWTs. They were worried about me, they wanted me out of the way. You remember what things were like.”

Yes, Remus wanted to say, yes, I bloody remember. Sometimes I wake up and it’s like it’s still happening.

“And with us being purebloods... I think they were worried I’d have to pick a side. So they sent me away - we have family in Gothenburg, and I got my qualification in Magical Finance.”

“Right.” Remus nodded. He really needed to talk about something else. “Good for you, Chris. So, um... are you in Soho often?”

Christopher turned crimson again, and looked down at his mug of coffee. “Only... only sometimes. Honestly, I just heard about that place and thought I’d take a look, I didn’t... I don’t want you to think...”

“You know you ought to be careful,” Remus said, lowering his voice in case any of the cafe patrons were listening in, “There’s this illness the muggles are getting - I’m not sure how much your lot know about it, but it’s really serious.”

“Like I said,” Christopher said, “I barely go there, really. Just stupid curiosity.”

Remus felt a twinge of guilt, for making Christopher feel bad. If Grant had taught him anything, it was that you should never add to anyone’s personal shame. It was a wasted emotion anyway, no need to make it worse.

“There’s nothing wrong with being curious,” Remus said, gently, “Lots of people go to those places.”

“Do you?” Christopher looked up at him.

“No.” Remus said, a bit too quickly. “Er... I mean, you know I was never very sociable.”

“Oh, of course. I can imagine, after everything that happened...”

Remus didn’t want to get onto that, so he changed the subject, “Seeing anyone?” he asked, “Got a boyfriend?”

Christopher shook his head. “No. It’s difficult, you know. The job I have, my family. Things have been... well, there’s been a fair bit of trial and error, in that respect.”

Remus wanted to squeeze his hand over the table, but it wasn’t really the place. He tilted his head, sympathetically,

“It will get better, Chris.”

Christopher looked at him with a resigned smile. “Mm, yes, I remember you saying something like that before, at school. Someone for everyone.”

“Well, there is.” Remus nodded, encouragingly. “More than one person, even.”

“I don’t know.” Chris sighed, “I don’t know if it’s healthy to think like that. There are so many factors to consider, and I don’t... I don’t think it works like in books. I don’t think everyone has that experience.”

That was a difficult thing to hear. Remus didn’t know what to say, really, and felt weirdly self-conscious and naive. Certainly, Remus did not glamourise romance any more - if he ever had at all. Love had beaten the shit out of him on more than one occasion. But it had also been the only thing worth living for. It had lifted him, protected him, and kept him human. He had a sudden longing to see Grant, and wondered if he’d be home yet.

“Don’t feel sorry for me,” Christopher said, briskly, checking his pocket watch, “I have a nice enough time. I like my work, I make plenty of money, and when I get a free evening I still... you know, I’m able to enjoy myself once in a while. I just see it as a treat, rather than a lifestyle.”

Actually,” he leaned in a little, “I have a flat in Kensington - for when I work late, and don’t want to apparate all the way home. It’s nice there, if you’d like to see it.” He raised an eyebrow suggestively.

Remus’s mouth went dry, and he swallowed, flustered,

“Um. Nice of you to offer, really, but. I’d better be getting home. I’ve got someone waiting.”

“Oh.” Christopher sat up straighter, withdrawing. His face seemed to close up. “You’ve got someone.”

“Yes, for a few years, now.” Almost six, he realised. Longer than he’d had Sirius - if he’d ever really had Sirius.

“Well. Good for you, then. Look, I’d better go, Remus, it was very nice to see you again.” Christopher stood up, and extended a formal hand for Remus to shake. “We ought to have a proper catch up, one of these days, let me know if you’re ever in Diagon Alley, perhaps, I’ll arrange lunch.”

“Ok,” Remus nodded, shaking his hand.

He knew he would never be in Diagon Alley, and as Christopher didn’t give him any contact details Remus assumed that the invitation was merely politeness. He did not miss pureblood hypocrisy.

Remus walked home quickly, ignoring the ache in his hip, and was relieved beyond belief to find Grant already there, in the kitchen.

“Wotcher, boffin,” he grinned, “How was the museum?”

“Good, thanks. Interesting.”

“Reckon I should take some of the lads there on a trip, if I can get it past the governor.” He held up two tins, “Beans on toast, or spaghetti hoops on toast?”

“Whichever you prefer,” Remus said, watching him. Grant looked at them both cheerfully,

“Hoops then. With lots of Worcestershire, eh?”

“Sounds perfect.” Remus breathed.

“*Perfect*,” Grant chuckled, “You must be hungry.”

“No, I just... just missed you, that’s all.”

“I’ve only been at work.”

“I know...”

“Daft sod.” Grant shook his head, still smiling, turning his back to open the cutlery drawer and find the tin opener.

Remus crossed the room quickly, and hugged him, wrapping his arms around Grant’s waist, pulling him in and inhaling the scent of him. Grant set down the tin opener carefully, and hugged Remus back, rubbing his arms. “You alright, sweetheart?”

“Mmmhm.” Remus said, into his neck. “Just glad you’re here.”

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'It's a Sin' by The Petshop Boys (how did I get this far into the '80s without the Petshop Boys??)

British-isms:

- UCL - University College London
- National insurance card - Has your national insurance number on it. In the UK you need this to get a job, as it ensures you are making the right tax contributions on your salary. National insurance payments, made over your working life, mean you are entitled to various benefits (Job seekers allowance, maternity allowance etc.) and your state pension. I'm guessing wizards don't have them lol.
- The Observer - National broadsheet newspaper.
- Kick-about - impromptu/casual game of football. I'm guessing it's the equivalent to when Americans 'toss a ball around' or 'play catch'.
- Harrods - (not sure this actually needs explaining) high-end London department store, only used by tourists and the mega-rich.
- Boffin - a clever person (nerd, geek etc.)
- Worcestershire - Worcestershire sauce - the best possible condiment for beans/hoops on toast. Pronounced 'wooster', like the place.)

This is the last time, I promise....

If you are enjoying my fic, you might consider voting for me in the Shrieking Shack Society's Marauder Medals. I am nominated for best characterisation of James and best characterisation of Remus.

Vote here:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdGm5P_Ehq5Sjxdut6wJd71jZbh1EMQLREyDFhXlc

Thank you all, once again for all your support!

Chapter Summary

Been a while since I've done a Christmas chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Got on a lucky one

Came in eighteen to one

I've got a feeling

This year's for me and you

So happy Christmas

I love you baby!

I can see a better time

When all our dreams come true.

In 1989, Remus actually went to Oxford Street to do his Christmas shopping, on Grant's insistence.

"You've *never* been?!" He had gasped, eyes wide, "You haven't seen the lights?!"

"I didn't think proper Londoners got involved in all that nonsense." Remus replied, defensively.

"*Proper Londoners* leave the house." Grant said. "And buy presents for their friends."

"I don't have any friends." Remus said - then felt awful. Because of course, he had Grant.

"What about that Mary bird? Sends you letters all the time."

"Oh yeah. I could get her something, maybe."

"That's the spirit, Ebenezer."

Remus shrugged off the teasing, because he knew Grant loved Christmas - or any opportunity to celebrate, really - and Grant had had a very difficult year.

Having worked so hard to gain his school leaving certificate, pushing every step of the way to get A-Levels and various other qualifications, all so that he could have his dream job, which was helping other people, Grant had finally come up against an insurmountable opponent. The government - more specifically, The Local Government Act.

In 1988, Section 28 passed, and Grant was no longer secure in his position at work. Remus hadn't

really understood it at first, or at least, couldn't see why Grant should have to worry.

"You don't work for the council, though," he frowned, flicking through the leaflets Grant and his friends had been printing for awareness-raising.

"Yes I do," Grant replied, "Local authority includes schools and Borstals - and that's what it's really about. They don't want us perverting kids."

"That's ridiculous." Remus said.

"I know."

Remus re-read the text.

A local authority shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality, or promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

"Pretended?!" Remus shook his head.

"I know." Grant sighed.

"What does this mean, though? 'Promote' homosexuality? How do you promote it?"

"Well that's where the cunts have been clever, innit." Grant huffed, "It don't mean anything, not really. Just means if anyone wants to argue against it the fucking Tories can accuse them of wanting to 'promote' queerness or some bollocks."

"But that's..."

"Completely mental? Evil? Immoral. Yeah. My mate Gay Bob, he's already had to shut down the Gay Youths Support group, only started that last year. And my place ain't exempt, the governor's already asking for a list of books we carry, check none of them are too queer."

"But they can't... they wouldn't sack you?"

"I don't know, love. I'm already trying to keep my head down over the AIDs thing."

Remus felt even worse about that. The staff at the centre Grant worked at had all been hauled into a meeting one day, and told in no uncertain terms that if any one of them contracted HIV, then they would be dismissed without notice - and the police would be notified. That was terrifying enough.

For the past eighteen months, Grant had been working tirelessly with his friends and various groups to appeal Section 28, and it wasn't going well at all. He'd almost been arrested at one protest, and caught a black eye off an anti-protester at another.

"It's war." he said fiercely, when he returned, and Remus made him sit still so he could heal it, "It's us and them, that's how they want it, and that's what they'll get."

Remus did not know what to say. He didn't want a war, he just wanted to be left alone. He never said that, though, because deep down, he was very proud of Grant's barefaced refusal to give up or give even an inch. He had always admired bravery most of all.

So, in late December, Remus and Grant bundled themselves up in woolly hats, gloves and scarves, and walked through the wintry grey city to Oxford Circus. Grant was right - the prat - the lights were great. Strung across the wide street like jungle vines, great gleaming golden bulbs

illuminated the cheerful red double deckers, the shiny black cabs, the glorious silver and green window displays.

It was true, Remus had been avoiding Christmas and all its trappings, just like he avoided his birthdays. He was worried they'd send him hurtling backwards - to Hogwarts, to the Potters mansion, to all of his most bittersweet memories. It was very hard to be without his friends at that time of year.

But there was something very cleansing about the chaos of shopping on Oxford Street. The noise and the bustle and the smells ensured that he couldn't sulk for very long, and Grant's enthusiasm for the season did the rest.

"Right, let's have a look for Mary's pressie first, shall we?" He grinned up at Remus, bouncing on the balls of his feet. "House of Fraser? Or is she a Selfridges girl?"

"Whichever is trendier, I s'pose," Remus said. "What did you have in mind?"

"Gawd, I've no idea. Bath shit?"

"Yeah," Remus nodded, "Bath shit. Or perfume?"

"Ooh, perfume, eh?" Grant nudged him with his elbow, "That's intimate. Should I be worried?"

"About Mary?" Remus snorted, "You'd be too late."

They wandered through the perfume departments of three or four big department stores. Remus somewhat regretted his choice, then - his hypersensitive sense of smell meant that he was already nursing a headache after the first stop.

He eventually settled on something floral, in a pink and gold bottle, because it was pretty, and stylish, and Mary was pretty and stylish. He even had it gift wrapped, in gold paper with a red satin bow. Gryffindor colours, he smiled to himself.

"Right, you can buy my present next," Grant grinned, tugging his sleeve, "I want new socks, mine have all got holes."

Remus took a big gulp of cold fresh air as they came outside, relieved. "I've got to get you something better than *socks*," he said.

"Could do with some new Y-fronts too." Grant winked, and Remus blushed, looking down. He'd get something really nice, later on, when Grant wasn't looking. He wasn't sure what, yet, and he didn't have a lot - but maybe a new coat might not stretch things too far? Grant was in dire need of one, his second-hand duffle barely kept the chill off.

"What do you want?" Grant asked, looking at a window display designed to look like the north pole, with big white pillows stacked up to look like igloos and gigantic stuffed toy penguins.

"Chocolate." Remus shrugged.

"That's what I always get you..."

"That's all I want, now I don't smoke."

Grant shook his head, tutting at Remus's temperance.

Suddenly, Remus caught a whiff of magic. For a moment he wondered if his senses were just

wrecked by all the perfume, but no, it was very clear. He looked up and down the street, curiously. Then he saw him, standing outside the Marks & Spencer's window display.

"Christopher? Is that you?" Remus approached slowly.

"Remus!" Christopher turned, surprised.

"We have to stop meeting like this," Remus laughed. He was in a good mood, and at least he hadn't caught Chris in a compromising situation this time.

"Yes, quite right," Christopher laughed too, a little nervously, clearing his throat at the end. He was carrying several bulging shopping bags, in both hands. "How are you? Sorry I haven't been in touch, it's been ever so busy at work."

"That's ok. I'm well," Remus nodded. Christopher's eyes flicked towards Grant. Remus remembered his manners, "Sorry, er, this is Grant, my..."

"Better half." Grant finished with a cheeky grin, holding out a gloved hand. Christopher looked as though he didn't know whether to laugh along too, but he shifted his shopping bags to shake Grant's hand,

"Christopher Barley," he said.

"Chris and I were at school together," Remus explained.

"Oh, I see," Grant nodded, eagerly, his eyes bulging. He never said anything about it, but Remus knew Grant was secretly dying to meet another wizard, just to compare. "Live in London, do ya?"

"Er, no. Just in for shopping, you know. Christmas."

"Us too," Remus said.

"How nice." Chris said very formally. It was starting to get a bit weird - Remus felt like they were at a middle class cocktail party or something, exchanging pleasantries.

"Chris dear? There you are!" A short blonde woman came trotting up the street in neat black high heels and a gorgeous ermine coat. She was tugging a little boy along by the hand - he looked about five years old, and he had Christopher's eyes. "Can we go quite soon? There are too many muggles about, it's suffocating."

Christopher avoided Remus's gaze, and greeted the woman.

"Sorry, dear, I was just... I bumped into an old Hogwarts friend." He gestured vaguely.

"How lovely!" She turned her red-lipped smile on Remus. She held out a tiny hand, and he shook it awkwardly, not sure if he was supposed to kiss it.

"Darling, this is Remus, and his friend Grant. Remus... this is Åsa," Christopher mumbled, "My wife. And Henrik, my son."

"Pleased to meet you," Remus nodded. Grant nodded too, but Remus could tell he was uncomfortable.

"It is a pleasure!" Åsa gushed, "I have to say, I don't meet so many of Christopher's school mates. You must come for dinner one evening, and tell me all about his mischiefs!"

“Ha, yeah, definitely,” Remus laughed self-consciously, rubbing the back of his neck. He didn't even know what he was saying. Christopher was married?! He had a kid?!

“Well, we'd better be going.” Christopher said, his face weirdly blank. “Merry Christmas, Remus.”

“Merry Christmas...” Remus gave an awkward wave, as the family turned to walk away, towards Diagon Alley.

“Is it just me,” Grant said, as they left, “Or was that strange?”

“Very.” Remus said. “He must have met her in Sweden... He said his family sent him there...”

“It wasn't her that was strange.” Grant said.

“No, I mean...” Remus bit his lip, “Er... so I know Chris from school, but I've seen him since. About eighteen months ago, coming out of that sauna in Soho.”

“Oh!” Grant said. “Right, I get it. Poor bloke.”

“He never said anything then... he... how old did the kid look, to you?”

“Older than eighteen months.” Grant shrugged.

“Yeah...”

It soon began to rain; icy cold December rain, so they ran for the next bus and went home. Remus often thought about Christopher, after that, and it troubled him. There was nothing much he thought he could do about it, and really it was none of his business - but he didn't understand at all. Had Christopher been convinced, or coerced? Did he love her, was he happy?

By the time he and Grant got in from the rain they were freezing and soaked through. They took a hot shower to warm up, then Remus lit a fire in the old floo connection to heat up the flat for Grant.

“How does that work when we ain't got a chimney?” Grant asked, bringing in the tea.

“Magic.” Remus yawned, as Grant settled down beside him.

“I'm like that bloke in Bewitched married to the sexy blonde.”

“I don't wiggle my nose though.”

“Aww, now I'll never leave you alone until you do,” Grant grinned.

Remus gave him a haughty look, and pointed his wand at the radio. They were so cosy, it felt wrong to switch the telly on.

"Thanks for coming with me, today." Grant said, wrapping his hands around his mug of tea to warm them, "I know you hate crowds."

"I don't mind, really. Thanks for getting me out of the house. And showing me the lights."

"Any time," Grant snorted. "Always cheers me up, Christmas shopping. Y'know, no one's thinking about themselves - just making other people happy - it's nice."

"I thought you were against the commercialisation of Christmas." Remus commented, wryly. Grant elbowed him,

"I *am*, but some of it's still nice. Anyway, thought you'd like a break from politics this weekend."

Remus didn't respond, just kissed Grant's cheek, and settled in to listen to the radio. The tail end of a Suzanne Vega song was playing. "Love this tune," Grant murmured, leaning against his shoulder, "Love her voice, all clear and weird, you know what I mean?"

"It's a greek myth," Remus replied, drowsily, "Odysseus."

"Nah, it's something beginning with a C," Grant replied, sipping his tea.

"Yes, Calypso - she's the siren, but Odysseus is the main character."

"Siren? Isn't that like a mermaid?"

"Sort of. They lure men in with their singing."

"Are they real?" Grant asked. He always wanted to know.

"Yes, mermaids are. I don't know if Calypso was."

"So what did she do? They fell in love, or what?"

"Odysseus's story is called The Odyssey. It's all about his journey home from the trojan war." Remus furrowed his brow, trying to remember. It was Homer - he'd read that in his second year, either before or after The Epic of Gilgamesh, he couldn't remember. He hadn't really liked The Odyssey - he'd preferred The Illiad, because that had all the good war stuff in it. Maybe he'd feel different now, as an adult.

"The trojans... are they the ones with the wooden horse?" Grant asked, still trying to follow the thread.

"Yeah, that's right. Odysseus gets into all sorts of trouble as he tries to get home to his wife, Penelope. But the sea god gets angry with him about something - can't remember what, but he destroys Odysseus's ship, and he washes up on this island, where Calypso lives. She falls in love with him and holds him hostage for seven years."

"What does she do to him?"

"Oh, I dunno. Feeds him, heals his wounds and stuff. I think she dances a lot."

"She doesn't sound too bad. She sounds kind."

"Maybe. But she wants to make him immortal, and Odysseus wants to get back to Penelope. Calypso isn't his true love."

"Sort of sad." Grant huffed, sounding put out.

"It's just a story." Remus shrugged.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Fairytale of New York' by The Pogues, AKA the best Christmas song ever written.

Song discussed at the end is 'Calypso' by Suzanne Vega.

Tories - nickname for the Conservative party. They are one of three major political parties in the UK, and are based on self-interest, preserving outdated values and supporting the rich at the expense of the poor. Unsurprisingly they are often in power.

Section 28 was not repealed across the UK until 2003. You can find out more about it here:

<https://lgbtplushistorymonth.co.uk/section-28-resources/>

Chapter Summary

Goodness gracious, it's only the bloody '90s!

Short one here, enjoy!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

And then she turns to me with her hand extended

Her palm is split with a flower with a flame

And she says "I've come to set a twisted thing straight."

And she says "I've come to lighten this dark heart."

And she takes my wrist, I feel her imprint of fear

And I say "I've never thought of finding you here."

Mary had her first child that year - a little girl she called Rachel, after her mother. Rachel Marlene.

"Not gonna lie," she told Remus over the phone, "I'm praying she's a squib. Can't be doing with all that nonsense."

She invited him to the Christening, and he went out of obligation. It had been decades since he'd set foot in a church, and this was a huge catholic one in Croydon. Grant didn't come, said he was too scared he'd burst into flames when he crossed the threshold.

"That's ridiculous," Remus sighed, tired and humourless, "Mary is *literally* a witch. If she's safe in a church..."

"My grandad was a bible-basher," Grant shuddered, "They can all *do one* , far as I'm concerned."

Grant was rarely so stubborn, so Remus went alone, and tried not to think about funerals.

After the ceremony, there was a bit of a party in the hall next door, and Mary showed off the baby. She was gorgeous; chubby with huge brown eyes and huge brown curls and a gummy smile sure to be as dazzling as her mothers' one day. Remus waved at the giggling cherub nervously, and patted her soft baby hand.

"I'm completely obsessed with her." Mary gushed, holding her up, "Want to hold her?" Mary grinned, then laughed that girlish cackle which took him back years, "I'm *teasing* , Remus darling. Here, I'll give her to Darren's mum for a bit, let's you and me have a catch up..."

They sat on red plastic chairs in a quiet corner of the church hall, clutching paper cups of watered down orange squash. It was a small space, filled with the noise of family celebration, and children playing. Mary's family was huge, and as brash and loveable as she was. Remus felt very out of place, but what else was new.

"You're not getting married, then?" Remus asked, "You and Darren?"

"Shh, Mum'll hear you," Mary giggled, "She's furious, of course, she's pretending we had a small ceremony in Jamaica before Rachel was conceived. Nah, I don't fancy it - and we've barely got the time what with the garage and the new house..."

Remus nodded along, smiling. It felt so good to be sitting next to Mary again; to have her chattering away, full of energy and joy.

"How about you, still up Soho?" Mary asked, giving him an appraising look. He'd come dressed in a suit he had bought the day before from a charity shop. It was ok; a bit seventies, and too big on him, but that was the style these days anyway.

"Yeah." He nodded, "Don't think I'll ever move, to be honest, the flat's paid for."

"Got a boyfriend?"

"Mm, sort of..."

"I know you have, why are you being so mysterious? Is he a muggle?"

"Yeah."

"Oh, I wish you'd come and see me more often, Remus. I worry about you."

He smiled at her, "You're such a mum."

That made her laugh. "Guilty!"

She was still beautiful, and looked the same at thirty as she had at eighteen, in his mind. She wore a loud, hot pink dress suit with razor sharp power shoulders and a gleaming gold fascinator perched atop her head. She'd cut her hair short, making her face look more angular, like a Nefertiti bust.

"Mum keeps calling me 'Grace Jones'," Mary touched her bare neck self-consciously, "I like it, though. Can't waste time fussing in front of the mirror when I've got the little monkey keeping me on my toes. Are you working somewhere?"

"Oh... here and there," Remus shrugged, noncommittally. "You know what it's like."

"You know Dumbledore gave *Snape* a job," Mary leaned in and whispered. Remus didn't know why - he was the only other person there who knew who Dumbledore or Snape were. "He's a teacher at Hogwarts, now. Can you believe that?!"

Remus shrugged. Mary continued, furious. This had obviously been on her mind for some time, "When I think of all the suffering that snivelling coward caused! When I think about all the friends I've lost... Lily and James, Peter... Marlene."

"Snape wasn't responsible for their deaths."

"How are we to know? So what, he turned spy for *two bloody weeks* at the end - and that guarantees him a cushy job for life, does it? What was he doing while we were hiding in cellars

like rats? Where was he when we were disappearing by the day?!”

“Mary...”

“I just can’t believe Dumbledore. Has he offered *you* any help? He hasn’t me. Not worth his time, I suppose. They all stuck together in the end; the old families.”

“I don’t *want* anything from him.” Remus said, “Being in Dumbledore’s debt is too dangerous. Anyway. Snape has to live with what he did; just like we all do.”

She lowered her eyes, then, and Remus knew they were both thinking about Sirius.

“I tell you what, Remus my love,” She said, finally, “I don’t care if she’s magic or not, my baby girl won’t be cannon fodder for that old bastard. Next time that lot want a war, you and me are going to be smart enough to keep well out of it, eh?”

“Too right.” Remus replied. They could agree on that, at least. He’d join the werewolves again before he ever re-joined the Order.

“You know, having Rachel makes me think about Harry.” Mary said, wistfully. “Now I’ve got a child of my own, just don’t know how Lily and James did it. Remember? We were all just kids, playing mummies and daddies, weren’t we?”

“I s’pose, yeah.”

“He’ll be starting Hogwarts next year, Harry.”

“What?! No, that’s not right, he must only be...” Remus struggled to do the maths in his head. “Shit.” He said. “I didn’t even think.”

“Poor little love, going to school with no parents to see him off.”

“Mm...”

“Oh gosh, sorry, Remus! I wasn’t thinking...”

“It’s fine,” he chuckled, “I’ve got over being an orphan by now.”

He stayed for about an hour before heading off to catch his bus in the cold dark of an early winter evening. He clutched two slices of cake wrapped in pink paper napkins - *one for you, one for your ‘sort of’ boyfriend*, Mary winked as she’d handed them over.

He kissed her cheek, and she stretched up on her tiptoes to hug him. She smelled the same, and it made him want to cry.

“Love you, sweetheart,” she whispered, “I’m so pleased to see you getting back to yourself.”

He gave her a half-smile, congratulated her again, and left.

She was right. He was getting back to himself - or if not that, becoming somebody else; somebody who was coping. He’d kicked fags and booze, he rarely spent afternoons staring at his bedroom ceiling, unable to get dressed. Sometimes weird things made him anxious, like the smell of motor oil, or when they played old Bowie songs on the radio. Once he’d seen a teenage girl with ginger hair get off a bus in Finsbury Park and almost followed her home. But he was doing better.

Sometimes he could even think about Sirius. Sometimes he could talk about him - only to Grant,

and only if he asked. Funny things, like pranks they'd done at school, or stupid in-jokes. He didn't think about them being together - he turned Sirius into a different person in his mind, just another character from his school days. That made things much easier.

After the Christening, on the way home, Remus thought about Harry. He hoped the kid was happy, or at least that he wasn't angry. Remus tried to picture himself, aged 11, crossing through the barrier at King's Cross for the first time. It had been nerve-wracking and exhilarating, and he hadn't known how to act, how to relate to anyone else. And then he'd met James, the first friendly face on the train that day. It was too cruel that Harry wouldn't ever know him.

Remus was in danger of getting nostalgic now, and weepy, so he got off the bus to walk the rest of the way home. He was tired by the time he got in, and his hip hurt, but that was ok; he felt good about having left the house.

"All right, sunshine?" Grant called from the kitchen as Remus shut the front door.

"Hiya,"

"How was it?"

"Church bit was boring. Seeing Mary was nice."

"Oh good," Grant came through to lean in the door frame. He was drying a dish they'd used last night.

"Leave that, I'll do it." Remus said, collapsing into the couch.

"Nah, it's done."

"Mary invited us for dinner. They live out in Hounslow though, bit of a trek... but if you fancied it..."

"Oh she knows who I am now?" Grant smirked.

"Sort of." Remus blushed. "she knows I'm seeing someone, just..."

"For almost nine years, Remus..."

"Sorry, it's just weird because... Mary knew me back then, you know."

"She knew you when you were with Sirius." Grant said flatly, turning back into the kitchen to put the plate away.

"Don't be like that!" Remus said, getting up stiffly.

"I'm not being like anything." Grant's face was hidden by the cupboard door.

"I invited you to the Christening, you didn't want to come."

"You know bloody well why, too."

"You hate churches, I know."

"Well, then."

"Why are we fighting?!" Remus frowned, confused.

“This isn’t fighting.” Grant closed the door to the cupboard, sighing.

“What is it, then?”

“It was ten years ago, that’s all. You’re still acting like I don’t matter as much as he did.”

“What?! No, that’s mad, that’s--”

“That’s all I want to say.” Grant raises a hand to stop him. “Like I said, this isn’t a fight.”

“But Grant, I don’t... you’re wrong, I swear! I want you to meet Mary, I do!”

“I’m going for a walk, ok? I need some air.” Grant pushed past him to the door. He took his coat off the hook - the coat Remus had bought him last Christmas. “I’ll be back in an hour or so. Take a paracetamol for your hip, will you? You’re limping again.”

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is Solitude Standing by Suzanne Vega.

I'd like to say a thousand thank yous to everyone who voted for me in the 2018 Marauders Medal Awards - I won both categories I was nominated in!

- Best Characterisation of James
- Best Characterisation of Remus

I am so proud and so grateful to have so many lovely readers :)

Chapter Summary

Been ages since we've celebrated a birthday!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I'm sure that everybody knows

How much my body hates me.

It lets me down most every time

And makes me rash and hasty.

I feel a total jerk before your naked body of work...

Sexuality!

Young and warm and wild and free!

Sexuality

Your laws do not apply to me!

Sexuality

Don't threaten me with misery!

Sexuality

I demand equality!

Saturday 9th March 1991

"Have you seen my wand?!"

"Nope."

"Bugger!"

"Where did you last have it?"

"If I knew that I wouldn't be looking, would I?!"

"All right, all right, keep your hair on," Grant emerged from the bathroom smelling of toothpaste

and pantene. Remus had almost turned the living room upside down in his search. He stood in the middle of the mess, running his fingers anxiously through his hair.

"I've got a million exam sheets to mark today, I really need it..."

"Just do it without magic, like the rest of us mortals," Grant shrugged, lifting the couch cushions to help him look.

"I can't, I *really* need my wand..." Remus huffed, looking under the TV table.

"Shame there ain't a spell to find it, eh," Grant chuckled. Then he saw Remus's face, and turned serious, raising his hand, "Ok, don't worry, we'll find it... right, last time you used it... er... when the lights went, last night, remember?"

"Oh yeah!" Remus rushed into the bedroom. They'd been having power cuts at least twice a week for the past month - Remus thought that was all over now the miners were back to work, but apparently not.

His wand had rolled under the bed. He snatched it up, relieved, and held it tight in his fist. "Thank Merlin." He whispered to himself.

"Got it?" Grant asked, as Remus returned to the living room. Grant was straightening out the mess Remus had left. Remus flicked his wand triumphantly, and the room re-ordered itself. Grant made a noise of surprise and delight. "Clever clogs." He grinned.

Remus poked his tongue out, and went to organise his pile of papers.

"Still don't see why you need your wand - does it speed things up, or something?"

"No, I need it to read," Remus replied, sitting down at the little dining table to work.

"Eh?"

"I have this spell that helps me read," Remus said, "I never learnt how to do it properly at St Edmund's."

"You can't *read* ?!" Grant had his hands on his hips, staring at Remus in disbelief.

"Well, I can *a bit* ..." Remus said, feeling defensive, "Just not very well - the words get all jumbled up, I dunno why."

"Oh!" Grant said, sitting down next to him. "You're dyslexic."

"I'm what?" Remus frowned at him. He'd never heard that word before; it sounded like a spell.

"Dyslexic. They used to call it word-blind. Nothing wrong with your IQ, it's the connection between your eyes and your brain or something... I read some about it when I was studying Education. Trying to get them to acknowledge it at work, I reckon a few of the boys need extra help, but the governor just reckons they're thick."

"Yeah, that's what they told me." Remus frowned. "...wait, so it's a real thing?!"

"Of course it is," Grant shrugged. "Bloody amazing you've got a spell for it, show me!"

Remus did, but of course there wasn't very much to see, and he couldn't do it on Grant. He made a mental note to look up dyslexia when he had some free time - if he could figure out how on earth to

spell the stupid word.

"I'll leave you to finish then," Grant said, "Remember our plans tonight!"

"Oh... yeah..." Remus sighed. "Well, if I finish in time, maybe..."

"Nope," Grant shook his head firmly, "We're going, Remus Lupin. I'm dragging you into the nineties kicking and screaming if I have to."

Remus laughed half-heartedly, trying to ignore the gnawing dread in the pit of his stomach.

It was his thirty-first birthday tomorrow, and Grant had decided that this was the year Remus would finally go to his first gay bar. As March approached Remus just wanted to hide until the day was over, like always. Birthdays always reminded him of the marauders.

"You ought to get out a bit," Grant kept saying, "Meet some people."

"I hate people." Remus would reply acidly, "People voted for Thatcher and keep buying Morrissey's records. People are idiots."

Grant laughed,

"People are great. Art, sex, coffee, conversation - can't have any of those without people. People are what makes it all worthwhile and you know it."

He was right - Grant was generally right about humanity.

And the world had certainly changed. Remus had missed out, as usual, immersed in the war, or locked up in his own grief. Grant returned to him from the outside world like an explorer with fantastical stories to tell.

Things were different now, for people like them - queers, or, more appropriately these days; 'gay men'. Just over two decades ago it had been a crime to live the way they did - and there had been plenty of bumps in the road since then, but you couldn't stop progress.

As the eighties drew to a close, it seemed gay people were everywhere; Grant made London sound like one massive coming out party. He told Remus about once seeing Freddie Mercury in Heaven, the Pet Shop Boys playing on the radio, Frankie Goes to Hollywood was number one again, Boy George's makeup - even *Elton John* was gay now.

So, Remus thought, it was probably time he at least try to get involved.

They went to a small bar, just around the corner, "I don't think you're ready for Heaven, yet," Grant teased him.

Remus wished he wouldn't make fun. He was more nervous than he expected to be.

"I won't fit in..." He said, checking his face in the little mirror by their front door. He was looking old. *Thirty-one*. Jesus Christ, only yesterday he'd been seventeen.

"It's a gay bar." Grant tutted, standing behind him with an amused expression. "You're gay. You'll fit in."

"I dunno if I'm *that kind* of gay, though..." Remus replied, touselling his greying hair to see if that improved anything. Not really, just made him look a bit scruffier. "Won't they all be... I dunno, younger, more fun?"

“You’re loads of fun.” Grant said. Remus met his eyes in the mirror and raised an eyebrow. Grant snickered, “Well, *I* think you’re fun. I’m not gonna make you dance, don’t worry.”

“Let’s stay in and get a Chinese!” Remus pleaded, one last time.

“No,” Grant shook his head, smiling, “You promised me. One hour minimum, come on.”

So he went. Maybe he was getting soft in his old age.

Remus was right - the crowd in the little bar was younger and more fun. There were a few people older than him, though, which made him feel a bit less out of place, and at least all the coloured lights hid his grey hair.

When Remus was a little boy at St Edmund’s, the one TV show everyone had agreed on wanting to watch was Top of the Pops on Friday evenings. They’d gathered around the tiny fuzzy black and white screen, and through the blizzard of static watched the trendy young people dancing along to their favourite pop songs. The St Edmund’s lads were particular fans of Babs Lord, the bouncy blonde lead dancer of Pan’s People, Top of the Pops’ in-house dance troupe.

That studio had looked like the coolest place on earth to eight year old Remus, and he was instantly reminded of it as he followed Grant into ‘Boyz’. Except that devotees of busty Babs would have been very disappointed, because the clientele in here was decidedly male.

Oh my god, Remus thought to himself, as he walked through the busy dance floor to the bar, *are they all gay?! Do they all know I’m gay?! Oh my god...*

“Do you wanna calm down there, sunshine?” Grant gave him a look as they took up two barstools near the light-up dancefloor.

“I’m fine!” Remus said, his voice maybe a bit too high.

“Stop staring, you weirdo! I’ll get you a drink.”

But Remus couldn’t help staring. Everyone was just so *brazen*, tight jeans, tight shirts - or no shirts at all, in some cases. They were dancing together, and laughing, and kissing, and it was all just fine - no one was saying anything about it. Remus’s head was spinning.

Grant handed Remus a drink - a cherry cola, because he still wasn’t supposed to be drinking. Remus sipped it, and tried not to look as out of place as he felt. He didn’t know any of the music, either, it was all too modern for him. God, he was old.

“I don’t know why you said I didn’t have to dance,” he said to Grant, “Seems like that’s the only thing to do.”

“You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to,” Grant smiled, “Relax! That’s the whole point of being here!”

Remus tried. He was glad it was not a busy night, he didn’t think he’d be able to cope with a crowd. He sat on his stool and sipped his coke, and looked around without staring, and eventually it felt a bit less scary. He felt a bit twitchy when a drag queen sidled up to him - six foot ten in pink PVC platform boots and a Dolly Parton wig, but she fluttered her massive eyelashes at him and held out a cigarette,

“Got a light, handsome?”

Remus felt his cheeks burning, and shook his head shyly, "Sorry," he mumbled, "Don't smoke."

"Oi, do your trick though," Grant elbowed him. He addressed the drag queen, "Remus 'ere does this 'mazing magic trick."

"Well I love a bit of magic," the glamorous stranger purred. Remus bit his lip, but nodded,

"Ok, um..." he took the cigarette and put it between his own lips, then snapped his fingers. The end lit at once, and Remus took a quick drag, for his troubles, before handing it back.

"Blimey!" The drag queen blinked, staring at the lit fag, "Amazing is right! Better watch out for you, eh, magic man?"

Remus blushed again, looking down at his coke, "Just a sleight of hand."

"Come here often, then?" She leaned against the bar, smoking, her blood red lipstick staining the fag end.

"Oh, no!" Remus said, maybe a bit too quickly.

Grant laughed and put a hand on his shoulder, "It's his first time. Brought him for his birthday."

"Oh, happy birthday!" She smiled broadly, "We'll have to play you a song, later - just go and tell the DJ, ok sweetie?"

"Er, ok." Remus nodded, planning to do no such thing.

"See you later, boys," the drag queen winked and sailed away across the dancefloor.

"Wasn't so bad, was it?" Grant said. "You'll be ready to march with me in the pride parade by July."

"I don't know about that..." Remus laughed.

He gazed at the dancefloor a bit longer. The drag queen had treated him as if he'd belonged. Rather than feeling more self conscious, he actually felt a bit happier - everyone was nice enough, no one was being nasty, or rude. He watched a couple kissing in the middle of the floor - they were really going for it, groping each other's backsides - and people were actually *cheering*.

He remembered his friends cheering when Mary and Sirius kissed in the Gryffindor common room, all those years ago - that had been Remus's birthday, too, and the date of Remus and Sirius's first kiss, which had happened in shadows. Almost all of their kisses had been hidden away, because deep down they both knew that no one wanted to see *that*. Not in the seventies, not at Hogwarts.

Remus had a sudden urge to do something similar, here, in plain view, where everyone could see and nobody would frown or jeer.

Only he wasn't *quite* brave enough for public snogging just yet, even at the grand old age of (almost) thirty-one. So he just reached over and held Grant's hand, on top of the bar. Grant blinked in surprise, but then his face lit up so gorgeously that any last trace of nerves left Remus completely. He sometimes forgot that Grant had feelings too, which sounded heartless, but it was only because Grant so rarely complained. Happiness looked so good on him that Remus made a resolution to work harder on it.

They hung around a bit longer, until Remus had finished his drink. He had no desire to dance (though more than one person had approached, inviting him to join them) but the experience hadn't been dreadful. He said as much to Grant, who laughed,

"Told you so! Thanks for coming, darling, I know it's not easy."

"You make it easier," Remus said, softly - surprising himself. Grant looked taken aback, and squeezed Remus's hand again,

"Bloody charmer," he said, bashfully. "Come on, I've got a chocolate cake waiting in the fridge at home, you can blow out the candles and we'll kiss in the dark."

Remus grinned back, "Sounds perfect."

He nipped to the loo before leaving. He could have waited until he got home, they were only around the corner, but he felt that this was his last test of bravery.

The toilets were unisex, which Remus supposed was fair enough, if a bit embarrassing - there weren't any girls about at least. He went and used a urinal, as quickly as possible, trying to ignore the sound and scent of sex emanating from the cubicles. He was just washing his hands when the door swung open, and somebody closed in behind him. He spun around, surprised, and faced the stranger.

"What--"

The man grinned wide, showing his teeth. He licked his lips and sniffed the air, and then it hit Remus - the familiar scent, the instant connection - the lack of respect for personal space. A werewolf.

"I smelled your magic," the man said, his voice low, "*Delicious* . Haven't seen *you* before..."

He wasn't as tall as Remus, and he was quite thin, in a skin tight white shirt. He had long flame red hair, straight as a poker, and glacier blue eyes. The scent of earthy natural magic radiated off him in waves that made Remus giddy, blood rushing through his veins and arteries like an elixir.

"Hi..."

The stranger sniffed again, "Which pack are you? You smell like Greyback..."

Remus balked a bit at the idea he had anything of Greyback in him, but he shook his head, "No pack."

"Brave of you... Not worried you'll get rounded up by the Ministry?"

"What about you? Who are you with?" For a moment Remus hoped he was one of Castor's - he desperately wanted to know how they were all doing, but the stranger just shrugged.

"Oh, we drift here and there. You won't have heard of us."

"But you know Greyback."

"Oh yes." He pulled his shirt down at the collar, revealing an enormous bite mark which was all too familiar to Remus, "We go back a long way, he and I..."

"The war, were you--"

“Ha, I was barely a pup, back then,” the werewolf raised an eyebrow. His skin was so fair that his scars were like streaks of silver, pearlescent as moonbeams. “But the next war... the next war, we shall be ready for.”

“There won’t be another war.” Remus said. He was backed against the porcelain sink, the werewolf had placed a hand either side of him. He was trapped, but he’d made no move to escape, not yet. “Voldemort’s dead.”

“Mmm, some say...” the werewolf smirked. He leaned in and licked behind Remus’s earlobe. It made him shudder all over, he had to hold in a whimper. The other man pressed in on him, and whispered, “But I have heard that part of him lives still. The forests speak of ancient magic, of cursed blood... the dark lord gathers his strength...”

“No...” Remus shook his head. He tried to push back, but only succeeded in grinding their bodies together. He knew it was all lies, and he knew this man was trouble, but *oh god*, the scent was so heady, his body wouldn’t listen to him; it only wanted one thing.

“Come,” the werewolf kept whispering, his breath hot on Remus’s neck, “No more talk of war, it’s not our concern just yet... I want to enjoy you. Do you live nearby? We can go anywhere you like - this is going to be so good, the moon’s waxing...”

Remus shook his head again, as if he could rid himself of the fog of pheromones flooding his system, “I’m here with someone.” He rasped.

“Bring them, if you like...” the wolf chuckled, “I’m all for sharing.”

“N-no, I have to go...” Remus used his last shred of willpower to extricate himself from the stranger and hurry back into the bar, feeling the wolf’s eyes blazing at his back.

He found Grant and grabbed his shirt sleeve, hissing, “We have to go home.”

“Eh? You all right, something happen?”

“No... um... I just want to go home. I want to take *you* home.” He met Grant’s eyes, still holding his arm, and he wondered if Grant could feel it too, feel the burning, the need. Sirius always could, but perhaps you had to be sensitive to magic? Remus focussed the intensity, projecting it outwards. Grant’s eyes flickered and his pupils dilated, a warm blush creeping up his neck.

“All right, then.” He knocked back the last of his drink, and they left, running out onto the busy street together, hand in hand.

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'Sexuality' by Billy Bragg.

Dyslexia was first recognised by the UK government in 1987, but it took a very long time for this recognition to trickle down to the school system.

And this is the LAST chapter of Grant/Remus living in domestic bliss, I'm sorry to say. I'm happy with the place Remus has got to development-wise, and I think he is ready for the next challenge ;)

The next chapter is a new beginning, and after that only a handful of chapters to go. Once again, this fic WILL END in the summer of 1995, before the events of Order of the Phoenix. (Please stop asking me!)

Summer 1993

Chapter Summary

Remus has a visitor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I stumbled out of bed

I got ready for the struggle.

I smoked a cigarette

And I tightened up my gut

I said this can't be me; must be my double

And I can't forget (I can't forget)

I can't forget but I don't remember what.

7th August 1993

An owl arrived that morning, and it was as if Remus had been waiting for it all along. He was brushing his teeth when the bird landed on his bathroom windowsill, brown and tawny. He recognised it at once – he would know a Hogwarts owl anywhere. It gave an official ‘hoot’ and stuck out its scaly leg. Remus untied the letter, toothbrush clenched between his teeth, mouth full of froth. He spat and opened the envelope as the bird took off again, navigating the narrow brick buildings with the perfect ease of a predator.

Mr R. J. Lupin,

Professor Dumbledore wishes to pay you a visit today at about tea time. He apologises for the short notice given, and hopes that he will be made welcome. No need to provide refreshments.

Hoping you are well.

It was not signed, and had presumably come directly from the headmaster’s office. Remus expected his insides to turn cold, his hands to shake, tears to prick in his eyes. But nothing came; he felt no reaction other than extreme tiredness. Heaving a sigh, Remus finished brushing his teeth and dressed.

Grant had left at some point for football practice - he’d invited Remus; he always asked, but Remus

never took him up on it. He'd spent enough of his life watching people who were sportier than him doing sporty things.

It was a Saturday, and there was nothing much to do, so Remus read the paper – The Guardian; he hadn't picked up a copy of the Prophet in years – and settled in to wait.

He expected that 'tea time' was about 5pm, though you could never tell with Dumbledore. He tried to picture his old head teacher, wondering whether twelve years had made much difference – and to see if he was still angry. But no, Remus didn't think he had the energy for anger any more. Maybe he'd used it all up.

Restless, Remus switched on the telly, then turned it off again when there was nothing to watch but *Grandstand*. He found himself growing agitated. What sort of person simply announced their visit the morning of? What sort of person just invited themselves over? No one but Dumbledore. It was downright rude – what if Remus had had plans? He briefly wondered about teaching the old goat a lesson – walking out and going to see a film, let Dumbledore arrive to an empty flat. Serve him right. *But. But.*

Remus wanted to know. It had to be important; no one from Hogwarts or the Order had tried to get in touch since the early eighties. It could be anything.

Finally that old familiar *CRACK* sounded just outside, and there was a soft but purposeful rap at the door. He opened it quickly, and found Dumbledore almost exactly as he'd remembered. Hair a bit whiter, if that was even possible, but very much the same man. A queasy feeling rose up in Remus's throat, and he felt eleven years old again.

"Professor." He said, dryly, standing aside to allow Dumbledore entry.

"Remus," the old man smiled, "How are you?"

"Fine," Remus rubbed the back of his head, "Fine, yeah."

"Lovely." Dumbledore's bright blue eyes darted about the room, taking in every inch of the home Remus had once shared with Sirius.

"Sit, if you want." Remus offered.

"Thank you."

"Tea?"

"Certainly, very kind."

Remus took the opportunity to escape to the kitchen. He made the tea the muggle way, with the electric kettle, just to stay away a bit longer.

"Sugar?" He called,

"Three, if you please."

The old man still had his sweet tooth then. Remus remembered the sherbet lemons with reluctant fondness. Tea made, he returned to the living room and set the mugs down on his battered old coffee table, using an old copy of *Private Eye* as a coaster.

"It's been ages." Remus said, sitting in the armchair.

“Twelve years.”

“I know.” Remus flinched, irritated. Did Dumbledore really think he didn’t count away each passing year? Each month?

“You’re keeping well?”

“Well enough. I get by.”

“Do you know why I’m here?” The wizard asked. Remus shrugged,

“Haven’t the foggiest.”

Dumbledore sighed very softly and set down his mug of tea. “I was somewhat afraid of that. You haven’t been reading the news, then?”

“Not your news, no. Why?”

“Oh dear, I had hoped you’d already... you see, Remus—”

“He’s dead, isn’t he?” Remus said suddenly, sharply. “Black. He’s dead?”

Dumbledore fixed him with a very intense stare.

“No,” he said, gently, “He is not dead. Sirius has escaped.”

For a moment, Remus thought he had misheard. Escaped. Would dead have been better? At least if Sirius was dead then it was all over, finally. He couldn’t wrap his head around what ‘escape’ meant.

“Christ.” He dropped his head into his hands.

“Indeed.” Dumbledore sipped at his tea. Remus didn’t trust himself to lift his mug, so he simply sat there, staring at the carpet. It needed hoovering badly. “I take it, then,” Dumbledore said, evenly, “That Mr Black has not been in touch?”

Mr Black. He spoke as if they were still his students. Remus just shook his head mutely, looking up. Dumbledore nodded, and Remus knew he believed him.

“Is he... I didn’t know anyone could escape Azkaban.”

“Sirius would be the first.” Dumbledore said. “He was always a very gifted wizard.”

“Mm.” Remus couldn’t think properly, he felt as if a vault of long forgotten memories was easing open in his mind, its hinges rusty and sore. Could a dog escape the dementors? Could a dog swim to the shore? The north sea was so cold, he shuddered to think about it. Twelve years.

“*Honey ahhhm home !*” Grant clattered through the door in fluorescent yellow football shorts with a terrible American accent and a cheesy grin, which froze when he saw Dumbledore, “Oh, sorry... tea party, is it?”

Remus stood up, anxiously, rubbing his arm, “Grant, I... um... this is my old head teacher. Could you give us a minute?”

“If you want,” Grant furrowed his brow, eyes darting back and forth, “Should I leave?”

“No, don’t go, just...”

“I’ll wait in the other room.” Grant said, understanding quickly.

Remus blushed slightly, Dumbledore was sure to know that ‘the other room’ was the bedroom.

Grant edged around the room awkwardly. Just as he reached the bedroom door, he patted his pockets, “Err... Remus, got any fags?”

“*Accio Marlboro’s*,” Remus said, with a twitch of his wand. The packet flew into his hand and he withdrew one of his own, lighting it with his wand, then threw the box to Grant, who caught it deftly.

“Cheers,” Grant nodded, retreating into the next room.

Remus took a long drag, staring into space. His head swam; he very rarely smoked anymore. He hid a box for emergencies. And this was an enormous emergency.

“You perform magic in front of this young man?” Dumbledore asked.

Remus gave him an irritated look. What a stupid thing to care about, “Yeah yeah, statute of secrecy,” he replied, tutting, flicking his ash onto the coffee table, “Give me detention for it if you like.” He took another pull.

“Fortunately, the statute of secrecy does not apply to partners, spouses or family members.” Dumbledore replied, calmly, “And I assume he is your...”

Remus exhaled smoke, rubbing his head again, “Well he’s not my fucking brother, professor.”

Dumbledore did not flinch.

“I’m sorry, Remus.” He said, “You’ve had a shock. I hadn’t realised that you’d shut yourself off so much, I had thought...”

“No one to shut myself off from,” Remus snorted, “Everyone’s gone anyway.”

“I wish I could give you some time to adjust to this news, but I’m afraid there’s another reason I’ve come today.”

“Of course there is,” Remus sighed, deeply. He just wanted Dumbledore to leave. He needed a drink, for the first time in years. He needed to drink himself into a stupor, to drown every thought in his head.

“Are you working, at the moment?”

“Here and there,” Remus shrugged, “What I can get.”

“There is a vacancy at Hogwarts.”

“Oh yeah?” Remus snorted, “Filch left, has he? Not interested.”

“It is a teaching position.” Dumbledore replied, once again demonstrating his uncanny ability to remain calm when confronted with barefaced cheek. Remus laughed rudely,

“Have you *finally* cracked, Dumbledore?! You want to hire a werewolf to look after your kids, now?”

“There are measures we can take...”

“Oh no,” Remus shook his head, vehemently, “You’re not getting me back in that bloody shack.”

“Advances have been made, Remus,” Dumbledore said, sharply, “If you had kept in touch with the wizarding world you would know this. The discovery of wolfsbane potion has been of enormous help to many with your condition. It would render you almost entirely harmless during your transformations. I would make it a condition of your employment.”

“Why do you want me?” Remus eyed him with renewed suspicion. What was he after? Teaching positions at Hogwarts were highly coveted, he knew that much.

“I think you would make an excellent teacher, first and foremost.” Dumbledore said, “I also thought you might appreciate the opportunity. And with the news of Black’s escape, I—”

“Ah,” Remus nodded, “You want me nearby. Just in case.”

“For your own protection, of course.”

“He won’t come after me.” Remus said, stonily. “He might be mad, but he’s not stupid. He’s never been stupid.”

“Not stupid, perhaps, but reckless.” Dumbledore raised a snowy eyebrow.

Remus conceded. True enough.

“What would I be teaching? History? Care of Magical Creatures?”

“Defence Against the Dark Arts,” Dumbledore smiled pleasantly, now that Remus seemed to be coming around to the idea, “As an ex-member of the Order of the Phoenix, I thought you would be ideal.”

“Mm hm.”

“There is one other thing,” Dumbledore said, sounding unsure for the first time, as though he wasn’t certain what Remus’s reaction might be. Remus said nothing, just looked him in the eye and waited. Dumbledore set down his mug. “Harry.”

Pain flared somewhere deep inside Remus, like the reopening of an old wound. His mouth went dry again, and he sipped his lukewarm tea.

“I hadn’t thought.” He said, quietly. “I hadn’t forgotten, but I ... he’d be... twelve?”

“Thirteen, now.”

“Thirteen.” He shook his head, slowly. “Is he... what’s he like?”

“He looks like James.” Dumbledore said, sadly, “But there is a good deal of Lily in him too.”

Remus was quiet for almost a full minute, getting his breathing under control. Finally, he raised his head,

“Ok.” He said.

* * *

1st September 1993

“You’re going, then.” Grant said.

This was a redundant statement. Remus was literally packing his bags. He was getting the strangest sense of *deja vu*. How long had it been since he last packed a trunk for Hogwarts? He’d had to dig out all of his old robes, his weird wizard clothes. They were shabby and threadbare, but he wasn’t willing to fork out for new stuff, so he did his best with some mending spells. Grant had painted ‘Professor R J Lupin’ on his old briefcase as a joke, but it didn’t feel very funny at that moment.

“I’m going.” He confirmed, rolling up a pair of socks.

Grant sat on the bed, watching him, stony faced. Remus didn’t blame him. He was being unspeakably cruel, he knew that. And Grant was putting up with it, yet again. Remus looked at him. “It’s a job. It’s only for a year.”

“At your old school.”

“Yes, I’ve told you.”

“I’m worried about you.”

“I know you are.”

“If Sirius has escaped, and he knows you’re there, will he--”

“Can we not? I’m going, and that’s it.” Remus snapped, clicking his suitcase shut fiercely. He didn’t want to think about that. He just needed to get through today.

They were silent for a bit, then. Grant went and made tea, brought it back in. Remus stopped to sit and drink it with him. He’d given up smoking - for good this time, or so he told himself. Tea would have to do.

“You can still stay here, I’m not kicking you out.” Remus said. “This place is just as much yours as it is mine, and there are protection spells, I made sure.”

“Nah,” Grant shrugged, giving a defeated smile. “I’m rubbish on my own. Probably do the rounds, or board at the Borstal. Been a while since I’ve seen the Brighton lot, maybe I’ll pop down.”

“Stay in touch, ok?”

“I’m not about to cart an owl around with me.”

“Oh... s’pose not. I’ll try to get to a phone, if I can.”

“God, you make it sound like you’re off to war.”

Remus swallowed, dryly, and found he couldn’t speak. Fortunately, Grant didn’t have speaking in mind, just then. He took Remus’s tea from him, set it down on the bedside table, then turned around to push Remus down into the mattress.

“I’m going to miss you,” he smiled against Remus’s lips, working the button on his trousers. Remus kissed him back, as hard he had when they were teenagers.

Afterwards, Remus decided it was best to leave quickly. He wanted to think about Grant lying happy and flushed under the duvet; an enduring memory of youth and beauty. He dressed, and

picked up his bags.

Just as he was about to say goodbye again, Grant grabbed his wrist. "Oi. I love you, you tosser."

"Grant..."

"Go on," Grant looked at him, directly. His face just as honest and sunny as it had been at sixteen.

"Say it back."

"You *know* how I feel about you..."

"Yeah," Grant smiled, without a trace of bitterness, "I do. But it'd be nice to hear it. Go on, I know you can."

Terror gripped Remus's heart - but he swallowed it. He had to be brave; Grant deserved it. And he meant it; he did, *he did*. "...I love you."

"Cheers." Grant let go of his wrist, and that was all.

"We will see each other again," Remus said, forcefully - promising it to himself as much as anything. Grant stretched out sleepily and nodded,

"Yeah, I know." He sighed, "Like magnets, you and me. Always snap back together again."

Remus hurried out of the door, not wanting to get too upset. He had a train to catch.

Chapter End Notes

Dun dun duuuun.

Song at the beginning is 'I Can't Forget' by Leonard Cohen.

- The Guardian is a British daily newspaper, generally mainstream but left leaning.
- Grandstand was a long running sports coverage programme. It was 3 hours long and dominated Saturday afternoon TV (there were only four TV channels at the time!) Excellent theme tune.
- Private Eye is a satirical political magazine.

The next chapter will pick up in Summer 1994. As I've said before, I am not re-writing any scenes Prisoner of Azkaban, just as I chose not to re-write 'Snape's Worst Memory'. We're very close to the end, now!

Summer 1994

Chapter Summary

This was very, very hard to write, so I hope you can all forgive me for how all over the place it is.

As I said, I have absolutely no desire to re-hash scenes from the books, so this is as close as we'll get.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

If you, if you could return

Don't let it burn

Don't let it fade

I'm sure I'm not being rude,

But it's just your attitude

It's tearing me apart

It's ruining every day

I swore I would be true

And fellow, so did you...

Were you lying all the time?

Was it just a game to you?

August 1994

For the first week or so after Remus returned from Hogwarts, he didn't know how to feel. For the first time in a very long time, Remus was lost; untethered, drifting. He wandered around the flat like a ghost, going through the movements of everyday life, but feeling nothing.

It wasn't depression. He knew what depression felt like.

"It's shock," said Grant.

"Oh." said Remus, staring blankly at the TV.

Obviously he'd expected Hogwarts to stir up old memories. He'd known from the start that re-visiting the place could easily ruin him, but he'd done it anyway. Maybe he was a masochist. Maybe just stupid.

The castle was filled with ghosts from Remus's past, which was a deeply unsettling experience after spending the better part of a decade trying to forget all of it. The moment he arrived at King's Cross it all came flooding back - the pokey little train carriages with the worn-out upholstery; the trolley witch, chocolate frogs, the bustle and noise of students embarking on a new term. With the full moon ahead of him, he'd squirmed away in a compartment and promptly fallen asleep.

Until the carriage turned cold, and the dementors...

No. Anyway; ghosts. McGonagall was perhaps the strangest. She must have known he would be coming, but their first meeting had hit Remus harder than expected, and she'd seemed just as surprised as him. They weren't quite sure how to relate to each other, now.

"Mr Lupin! Oh - I'm sorry, *Professor* Lupin."

"Hello Prof-- I mean... er..."

"Minerva, please," she smiled gracefully.

She reached out and squeezed his arm. She was every bit as formidable as she had been twenty years ago, only a little greyer at the temples. But then, so was he. "It's wonderful to see you, Remus." She said, earnestly.

"It's good to be back," he lied.

Her eyes were soft and kind, as if she could see right through him.

"My office is always open, if you need anything. As ever."

He appreciated the gesture, but didn't prevail upon her very often, largely because he wanted to keep to himself. He also wanted to stay away from Gryffindor tower, if he could.

The rest of the school was familiar; the lush expansive grounds, the secretive forest, the food, the portraits, the staircases he had mapped so carefully. But Gryffindor Tower - the most intimate and happy space of his adolescence; that would be almost too much to recover from. He was put in mind of Homer, once again - the word 'nostalgia', which meant a painful homecoming. That was exactly how it felt.

He didn't socialise much with his peers. The staff knew, by and large, about his lycanthropy, but he still preferred to avoid any unpleasant conversations, if he could. Were they tutting, behind his back? Were they wondering about him? *No one's seen him for years, he was Black and Potter's closest friend - what does he know? What did he do?*

Funnily enough, Professor Binns had forgotten Remus, but at least Flitwick hadn't. He was very kind, inviting Remus him to stop by the Charms classroom for tea and toast a few times. Remus did, to be polite, but found it difficult to forget all the times he and Sirius had locked themselves inside the kindly professor's classroom. He generally found it very hard to reconcile his adult self, responsible for lesson plans and marking essays and the welfare of students - with his reckless teenage self, wild and arrogant and madly in love.

There were entire wings of the castle he actively avoided, for this very reason. He barely left his classroom and chambers except for meals in the Great Hall, and he never went to Hogsmeade,

except to quickly pass through on the way to the old phone box just outside the village. And thank god that was still there.

“How is it?” Grant asked, the first time Remus called.

“Awful. Bearable. I s’pose like teaching, the kids are ok. Actually the kids are great.”

“Well. Just focus on that. First time I went into a remand home after St Edmund’s I thought I was gonna have to quit. I swear those places all smell the same. Anyway, you can get past it, if you remember it’s about the kids, not you. Be the teacher you wish you’d had.”

This was good advice, and Remus did his very best. He hadn’t had much experience with young people, but he very clearly remembered being a young person himself. He tried to organise lessons he would have found interesting, bringing in magical creatures whenever he could, like Ferox had, and giving extra tips and pointers wherever students were struggling. Really it wasn’t too different from the study sessions he’d held back when he was at school.

Equally, Remus tried to pay attention to all of his students, and learn their characters, their individual needs. That was incredibly weird at first - he found he had no less than *five* Weasleys to teach, one in almost every year. Then there was poor little Neville Longbottom, awkward and nervous and twitchy. Narcissa’s son was in another class, the spitting image of Lucius, *and then, of course, there was...*

Anyway. Aside from Flitwick and McGonagall, the rest of the staff were virtual strangers to Remus - except, of course, for the Potions master.

Remus had really wanted to stay out of Snape’s way, but from the very first day it was clear that would not be easy. It was a full moon, and of course Snape was the only one who knew how to brew Wolfsbane Potion, the prick. He probably learnt how to do it just to torment Remus. It was bad enough they had to share a castle again, but Snape was hellbent on making sure Remus felt his displeasure at the arrangement.

“Lupin.” He said, haughtily, at their first meeting, just before the welcome feast. “I was surprised to hear you survived the war.” His lips curled, “When it seems so many of your friends did not.”

As foul as Snape was, it did bring out something Remus hadn’t properly felt in years. Mischief.

“Severus,” he smiled, warmly, “And I was surprised to hear you survived the trials. When so many of *your* friends did not.”

Snape sneered, and that set the tone for the year.

Severus had clearly not forgotten the events of their fifth year. He was as despicable as Remus remembered him, and had not aged well. His hair still hung lank and greasy, perhaps a little further back than before, his black eyes were more sunken, and his nose more beak-like. He made Remus’s skin crawl, but there was nothing to be done about it; they had to meet privately each month for the potion.

The potion itself was utterly vile, and Remus resented it bitterly. It tasted awful, but worse than that was the effect it had.

He still transformed, still suffered the agonies as his skull elongated and his back split open and his tendons creaked - but he fully retained his human mind afterwards. This was utterly horrible. Remus had come to see the monthly retreat into his animal brain as something of a catharsis. But having an animal body and human thoughts turned out to be very unpleasant indeed; he felt neither

here nor there, trapped in the wrong form and unable to escape. He curled up to sleep locked inside his office every month full of self-loathing.

In the mornings after he would limp to Madam Pomfrey's office to ask for murtlap essence. Of everyone from Remus's childhood, Madam Pomfrey seemed the most pleased to see him again. She had aged, like everyone else, but had retained her gentle touch, her sweet face and her no-nonsense attitude to Remus's wellbeing.

"Remus!" She reached up to hug him the very first moment she saw him. "Just look at you, you giant of a man!"

"Hello, Madam-- er... Poppy."

"As polite as ever," she smiled, "Come on, come and tell me what you've been doing with yourself."

They had a few very pleasant catch ups in her office, by the fireplace. She wanted to know everything about his transformations since Hogwarts, and he told her as much as he could. She was very interested to hear about the pack, and how they were able to heal each other by sharing group magic.

"I tried to get in touch with you, after the Potters died." She said, sadly, "But no one could tell me where you were living, and I didn't dare ask too much in case..."

Remus looked away, embarrassed. "I'm sorry." He said, "I wanted to be left alone."

"Yes, well you were the same as a boy, stubborn!" she smiled fondly. He smiled back, realising how much he had missed her.

For the first month or so, Remus's nerves were raw, he hesitated as he turned every corner, worried that he might see something painful. But, as pain often does, this lessened over time.

He slipped into a new character - not the teenage Remus who took risks without thinking, who was desperate to prove himself, and not the half muggle, half broken man he had been in London. Somewhere between these warring halves, he became Professor Lupin; restrained and serious, offering encouragement wherever he could.

And this was all just as well, because that was exactly who he needed to be, for Harry.

God, Harry.

Harry Potter was James and Lily seamlessly combined; all charm and cheek and strength and goodness. Remus had been worried - knowing that the kid's childhood had been far from ideal - that Harry would be difficult. Remus well remembered his own spiky temperament at thirteen; cruel adults make bitter children. But no. Harry was as kind-hearted and open minded as his parents - full of love and so, so generous with it. Getting to know him had been painful and joyful all at once.

The first time they met, Remus had thought he was still dreaming. He woke up on the train, clawed awake by dementors - those fucking abominations. He cleared the threat, and staring around at the faces of the frightened kids, found Harry, passed out on the floor. Until he opened his eyes he was James; nothing could convince Remus otherwise. A bit skinnier, maybe shorter than Prongs had been at thirteen, but otherwise the spitting image.

Of course, Harry had no idea who Remus was, and for as long as possible, it stayed that way. How

would he explain? Even after a few conversations with the boy, Remus was completely at sea. So he let Harry lead the way, and answered the questions which had suitable answers. When Harry came to him asking for patronus lessons so that he could keep playing quidditch, Remus couldn't say no. It was exactly what James would do, too.

And when Sirius came up, he sidestepped it. Harry already knew that Black and James had been friends, and Remus wasn't sure what more he could say without losing the kid's trust. *"Yes, Harry, your dad was my best friend, but Sirius Black was my everything..."*

No, it wouldn't do. What was more, Remus wasn't sure whether the wizarding world had its own version of Section 28 - if he started confessing to stuff like that, could he get in trouble for corrupting young minds? It was bad enough he was a werewolf.

By that time it was already clear that Sirius was nearby. When the convict broke into the castle on Halloween night, Remus almost walked straight off the grounds and apparated back to London. Maybe he would have, if the perimeter wasn't swarming with dementors - and of course the fact that Black was definitely after Harry.

That made Remus furious; hadn't Sirius done enough damage? He must have really lost his mind, he must have strayed so far from the young man who had cradled baby Harry in his arms with tenderness and awe. Remus used this as a reminder, to steel himself: it was no use mourning Sirius. *His* Sirius had died many years ago.

And then that night happened. In a matter of hours everything changed...

Fuck.

Maybe Grant was right, maybe it was shock. After being given his marching orders from Hogwarts (thank god; another year might have killed him), Remus took the Knight Bus back to London, his mind churning over everything he had learnt.

Events kept shifting and re-ordering themselves. Some things became clearer, others muddled by various versions of the truth. The things Sirius had said, the excuses Wormtail had snivelled, and everything Remus had thought he'd known - none of these accounts lined up quite right.

The only thing Remus was certain of, was that for twelve years he had hated the wrong person.

"Please come back," he wailed down the phone to Grant, once he was home. "Please, please..."

"On my way." Grant said, and hung up immediately.

It still took hours. Remus changed into his muggle clothes, throwing Professor Lupin's shabby robes in a corner of the bathroom, and paced the flat while he waited, cursing the slowness of muggle transport. He didn't drink. He wanted a clear head; he wanted to *understand*.

"Remus?!" Grant burst into the living room, tired and dishevelled. He'd had a hair cut in the past year; it was so short it barely curled any more. Remus hated it, but said nothing, just ran to hug him. "What happened?" Grant asked, huffing as Remus knocked the air out of him, but squeezing him back reassuringly.

He didn't look the same, but he smelled the same, and that helped; that was very grounding.

"He was innocent!" Remus babbled, still clinging on, "It was Peter all along! It was never him! I was such an idiot!"

“Remus, I don’t know what you’re talking about, please... let’s sit down, shall we? Christ, you’re skinny, don’t they feed you at that school?!”

Remus allowed Grant to take over. He sat obediently on the couch, accepted a glass of water, and a cigarette, because apparently Grant was smoking again, and the temptation was too much. The flat felt bare and stuffy, having sat empty for most of the year, and Grant opened the living room window, letting in the everyday sounds of foot traffic and pigeons.

“Ok,” Grant said, sitting opposite Remus, clasping his hands together in a very teacher-ly sort of way, “Let’s start at the beginning, shall we?”

Remus nodded. He was determined to speak. If anyone could sort all of this out, it was Grant. He was sure of that. “Sirius.” He said. “I saw Sirius. And Peter.”

“Wait,” Grant frowned, “Peter? I thought he...”

“No.” Remus said, darkly, his insides turning hot with rage, “He’s alive. He’s been hiding, all these years.”

“From Sirius?”

“From everyone. *He did it* . He betrayed James and Lily; it was never Sirius.”

“How... “ Grant shook his head, clearly confused, “So he was in prison all this time for something Peter did? Jesus. Ok. You’re sure? He’s the one who told you?”

“Yes, but I... I know for sure. I saw Peter, and I...” Remus faltered. “I just believe Sirius, ok?”

The fact was that he had read Sirius’s mind, and he was still trying to get his head around that. He tried to piece the events of the night together, for Grant’s benefit and his own. “It was all Harry - James’s son. He left the school one night, and I knew why, so I followed him - I was worried Sirius would try to... but then Peter was there, I *saw* Peter, and I didn’t know what to think.”

Something deep inside him had known at once; the second he saw Wormtail’s name appear on the map. But he’d had to find out, had to know for sure. And then he’d got to the shack, and there was Sirius, skin and bones and rags and madness, cackling on the floor, Harry standing over him, poised with his wand.

The wolf part of Remus took over, recognising that Padfoot was in danger, and he disarmed everyone at once. “*Where is he, Sirius?!*”

Then he saw the rat, and it all fell into place. His mind went rushing back to 1981; all the secrecy, the mistrust, the lies. He looked at Sirius properly, he widened his eyes, and - almost without trying - he entered Sirius’s thoughts. ***Show me*** he commanded, using the same magic the werewolves used - Sirius’s brain was half-canine by that point, and maybe that’s why it worked. Black resisted for a moment, no doubt recalling Walpurga’s forced intrusions, but he nodded, and he let Remus in.

“But Padfoot,” James’s voice, echoing from a distant past, ***“I thought we were agreed?”***

“I know, but this is better, can’t you see?! No one will ever suspect Wormy!”

“Like a double bluff!” Lily chimed in. ***“It’s brilliant!”***

Remus didn’t need to hear any more. He lowered the wands, and helped Sirius up, and embraced

him tightly. *I'm sorry*, he communicated wordlessly, *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry...*

Back in the flat, tears pricked in Remus's eyes, and Grant pulled out a hanky, handing it to him. "So is he free, now? Sirius?"

"No," Remus shook his head, collecting himself, "It all got so complicated, and I... it was a full moon. I only saw him for twenty minutes, maybe, and then I turned, and... so much happened without me. Peter ran away, they didn't catch him. I should have killed him when I had the chance! I wanted to, I was going to, but Harry stopped me."

Grant paled, his mouth a grim line. He didn't say anything, though.

"By the time it was morning, Sirius had escaped again too." Remus continued. "He's in hiding, and I don't know..." *I don't know if I'll ever see him again.*

He wiped his eyes, and ran his fingers through his hair. "Fuck! All this time! All this time and I believed it! How could I have been so stupid?!"

"Hey, stop it." Grant frowned, reaching out. Remus stood up abruptly, ignoring Grant and pacing the room once more, muttering to himself,

"I should have *known* he would never hurt James! I shouldn't have been so bloody gullible! So weak! I should have tried to see him, I could have got him out of there, I could have tracked down Peter, I could have..."

"Remus!" Grant raised his voice, "*Stop it.*"

Remus looked at him. "I don't know what to do." He said.

Grant sighed. "Me neither, mate." He rubbed a hand over his face, and Remus saw the rings under his eyes. Grant stood up. "But there's nothing you can do right this second, so. I'm going to have a shower, right? Then we'll get dinner. Then we'll talk a bit more."

Remus nodded, eagerly. Yes, this was what he needed; a plan. Clear, defined next steps. Grant left the room, wearily. Remus waited, listening to the water running, trying once again to get his thoughts in order. He did something he hadn't done since he was a teenager. He made a list.

So, Moony, he said to himself, what are the facts?

1. Sirius Black did not murder James and Lily Potter.
2. Peter Pettigrew was alive.
3. Peter Pettigrew had been a spy.
4. Peter Pettigrew murdered James and Lily Potter.
5. Sirius Black had been in prison for twelve years for a crime he was innocent of.

A surge of anger washed over him once more. He had believed it! He was as guilty as Dumbledore, as anyone else who had simply assumed Sirius was the spy, because Sirius was a Black. In fact, Remus was even *more* at fault, because *he* ought to have known! No one was closer to Sirius than he was.

Those last few months of the war were such a blur. Hadn't there been something wrong? Hadn't Sirius been distant, cold with him? In the years since, Remus had taken that as proof of Padfoot's betrayal, but now... now with a sick feeling, he saw it for what it was.

"He thought I was the spy!" He said to Grant, the second he was out of the bathroom.

“Eh?” Grant frowned, trying to get past Remus, wrapped in a towel. “Spy? What? Oi, let me get dressed, come on...”

Remus followed him into the bedroom and sat on the bed, talking fast as Grant dried himself and put on clean clothes.

“During the war, we knew there was a spy, we knew someone was passing information to the other side, but no one knew who. Afterwards, we thought it was Sirius - it all made sense, he was caught blowing up a street full of muggles, and--”

“Do you have to call normal people that?”

“Sorry. Anyway - Sirius was the secret keeper for James and Lily - err... that means he had this spell on him, so only he knew where they were. To keep them safe. But he switched with Peter, at the last minute, and now we know that *Peter* was the spy. And they didn’t tell me about the switch, Sirius didn’t tell me, because he must have thought...”

“He didn't trust you.” Grant said, bluntly. Dressed, he sat down on the bed too, at a distance from Remus.

“I suppose I can’t blame him...”

“Had you broken his trust before?” Grant raised an eyebrow.

“...No.”

“Did *you* think *he* was the spy? Before James and Lily died?”

“No, never!”

“Well then.” Grant stood up. “I’m going to nip to the shop - we need milk and bread... toothpaste...”

“Wait, no, what do you mean ‘well then’?!”

“Nothing. Look, come on, come to the shop with me. Then I promise we can talk about it. I’ll listen to you all night long if you want, I swear. I just want to get some food in you first.”

Remus went along with that. He watched Grant cook, and he swallowed every mouthful, and then he talked and he talked and he talked. But it was no good. It came to nothing in the end.

“If Sirius is in hiding, and Peter’s on the run...” Grant said, yawning.

“He’ll go straight to Voldemort, the rat.” Remus growled.

“Right, ok,” Grant waved a hand, “If Sirius is in hiding, then you can’t do anything. It sounds like it’s out of your hands.”

“Maybe I could send an owl... only that might give away his location...”

“And then *you’ll* get arrested and sent to Alcatraz, or whatever it is, for colluding with a criminal.” Grant said, with an air of finality.

“I just want to help him.” Remus said.

“Of course you do. But I don’t see how.”

They sat in silence for a while, thinking. It was dark outside, Remus didn't know what time it was, but it had to be pretty late. Grant looked exhausted, and Remus felt a small twinge of guilt, on top of everything else.

"Sorry to put you through this." He said, quietly, reaching for Grant's hand. "It's not really fair of me."

"It's fine," Grant gave him a small smile, stroking Remus's knuckles with his thumb, "I do understand. It's just... a lot."

"I know."

"How... how was it, seeing him? I mean, how did it make you feel?"

Remus shifted, awkwardly. There it was. The thought he'd been avoiding. Because if Sirius was innocent, if he'd never betrayed James, then he'd never betrayed Remus, either. And Remus didn't know what that meant to him, now, after so much time.

"We're both so different, now." He said, aware Grant was holding his breath while he waited for the response. "I barely recognised him, really, I just felt sorry for him." The flutter in his stomach told him he was lying.

Grant leaned over and kissed him. "Everything will be all right, in the end." He said.

Chapter End Notes

Song at the beginning is 'Linger' by The Cranberries (woo, '90s tunes!)

Next chapter (Early Summer, 1995) will be up ASAP.

Early Summer 1995

Chapter Summary

I don't really know what to say.

This chapter has a lot of ptsd stuff in it. Also passing mention of child abuse. As always, be kind to yourselves!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

We passed upon the stair

We spoke of was and when

Although I wasn't there

He said I was his friend

Which came as some surprise

I spoke into his eyes;

I thought you died alone

A long long time ago.

Saturday 24th June 1995

That fucking phoenix arrived, first, and Remus knew at once.

“What the bloody hell is that?!” Grant leapt up, startled by the silvery bird which burst into their living room. They’d been watching telly, with all the windows open to counteract the summer heat. Remus had just been about to put the kettle on.

The bird sat on top of their boxy little TV and opened its beak, speaking in Dumbledore’s voice;

“Padfoot is on his way.”

Remus nearly dropped the empty mugs he was holding.

“Fuck.”

“What?” Grant said, watching the bird vanish into thin air. “Who’s Padfoot?”

“Fuck.” Remus said again, setting down the mugs. He had begun to shake uncontrollably. He felt cold all over. “I don’t think I can. I don’t think I can...” he mumbled to himself, covering his mouth.

“Remus?” Grant stood up and touched his shoulder. “You’re scaring me.”

“Sirius.” He spluttered. “*Sirius* is Padfoot.”

“Bloody hell. The murderer?”

“Not a murderer, I told you.”

“Right, right, sorry. Coming *here* ?!”

“It’s his flat, after all.”

“Oh, I forgot.” Grant said, flatly. He bit his lip, “Should I... go?”

“No!” Remus clung to Grant, suddenly, “No, please, *please* don’t. I can’t be alone, don’t leave me alone with--”

“Ok, ok!” Grant soothed him, hugging him back, “Calm down, all right? I won’t go anywhere if you don’t want. Just... just try to get yourself together.”

“I’m sorry.” Remus took a deep breath.

He knew he was acting childishly. This was no time to fall apart. He’d had years and years of that. If Dumbledore was sending Sirius to him, then something had happened. Something important. Now was the time for strength and action. He gazed around blindly for something to do.

“This place is a mess! I should start cleaning. He won’t be long.”

Grant was helpless to do anything but watch as Remus ran around the flat like a headless chicken, using every cleaning charm he could remember, combined with some actual manual labour when he mucked up the spells. He couldn’t stop moving, he couldn’t bear to sit still for a moment, because then he might have to *think* .

Within the hour, there was a scratching noise at the door, and a low, gruff bark. Remus froze. A scent he had not known in many years reared something in his subconscious.

“Was that a dog?” Grant said, nervously, from the kitchen. “You *know* I hate dogs...”

“It’s him.” Remus breathed. He walked shakily to the door, and pulled it open. There was Padfoot - scrawny, mangy, fur slightly greying in places. But it was him.

“Come in,” Remus said, hoarsely.

The dog huffed, bobbing its head, and entered. Remus clicked the door shut, and leaned against it, watching as Sirius transformed back into himself.

Scrawny, mangy; greying in places. His eyes, those dark blue eyes that had broken Remus’s heart a thousand times as a teenager, had turned dull gunmetal grey. He was a bag of bones, unsettled all over. It was to be expected.

“I’ve come straight from Hogwarts.” He said. His voice was as hard and rasping as it had been last summer.

“Yes,” Remus said, rubbing the back of his head. “Dumbledore sent a message ahead.”

Sirius twitched, slightly, and nodded. “Something happened at the tournament. Harry was

kidnapped.”

“What?! Is he--”

“He came back, he’s fine - fine as can be expected. Voldemort’s back, too.”

“What?!”

“It’s true. Harry faced him.”

“No.” Remus felt sick.

“The Order’s reforming. Dumbledore told me to come here, lie low.”

“Right.” Remus nodded, still taking in the shock.

“If that’s...” Sirius’s face softened, he looked younger - more like the real Sirius, “If you don’t mind? I just followed orders without thinking, but I could go somewhere else if...”

“No!” Remus said, very firmly, snapping out of the confusion that had gripped him ever since Dumbledore’s patronus appeared. He put a hand on Sirius’s shoulder. Oh, he was so thin. “Of course you should stay here, it’s your *home*. ”

Sirius looked so relieved that Remus wanted to pull him close and wrap his arms around him. But he didn’t. He looked at Grant, who was watching warily from the kitchen doorway.

Sirius followed his eye line and gave a start. “You’re here.”

It wasn’t a question; just a statement of fact.

Grant, god love him, gave his breeziest smile, “Alright, mate? Tell you what, you look like you could do with a Chinese. I’ll pop out, shall I, Remus?”

“You don’t have to-”

“I think I do.” Grant smiled.

He grabbed his wallet from the coffee table on his way out. He didn’t kiss Remus on the cheek, as he usually might, but gave him a pat on the shoulder and said, “I’ll be half an hour.” He closed the door softly behind himself.

Sirius and Remus stood in silence for what felt like minutes.

Sirius frowned, making deep lines appear in his face.

“That was rude of me. I didn’t mean to be rude.” He began to scratch the back of his hand, anxiously, his fingernails long and black with grime. Remus felt a sorrowful tug deep in his stomach, and reached out to still him.

“How about a shower? Then a sit down. Everything’s ok.”

Sirius looked up at him. Remus had forgotten how much smaller he was.

“Sounds good.” Sirius nodded, weakly.

Remus showed him to the bathroom, which was silly, because obviously he knew where the

bathroom was; nothing had changed in thirteen years. While Sirius was washing, Remus went to the bedroom to find some clean clothes.

He pulled a few shirts out of the dresser - he wanted to give Sirius *his* things to wear, not Grant's, but after all this time Remus honestly didn't know which belonged to who. He settled on an oversized knitted jumper, which was definitely his. It would swamp Sirius, but it would be comfortable. Digging out a pair of tartan pyjama bottoms to go with it, he lay them carefully on the bed.

There was only one bed in the flat - there had only ever been one bed and they had only ever needed one bed. The problem of where to put Sirius was unanswerable. Remus was still staring down at the clothes when he heard the water go off (the boiler stuttered and clunked a few times, he'd been meaning to look at it for ages) and the bathroom door click unlocked.

"Remus?!" Sirius called out, a note of panic in his voice.

"Bedroom." Remus replied.

Sirius entered, his hair dripping on the carpet. He'd wrapped the biggest bath sheet around himself like a shawl, covering his whole body from neck to skinny ankles. Remus looked away, embarrassed, and gestured at the clothes laid out.

"Here." He said, "I'll let you change."

He made to leave, but Sirius's hand darted out and grabbed his arm. He had that wild look in his eye again,

"Don't go." He said, "Could you stay in the room?"

"Ok..." Remus nodded, patting Sirius's claw-like hand. He'd been scratching it again, it was red raw.

Remus turned and looked at the curtains while Sirius dressed himself. His movements sounded slow, like an old man, or an invalid - not like elegant, energetic Sirius Black. Fury seared through Remus. *They took everything from him*, he thought, *fiercely, everything that made him who he was.*

When he turned around, Sirius was staring at the bed. Remus looked too, trying to see it through Sirius's eyes. The neatly made bedspread; the matching bedside tables; one with a book on top, the other with a packet of cigarettes.

"I'll sleep on the couch." Sirius said. "I don't want to muck anything up between you and... and... sorry, his name's gone."

"Grant."

"Grant." Sirius looked away again. His eyes never rested long, he was always searching the corners of the room for something. "I've forgotten a lot, I think."

"That's ok."

Remus had never felt a pain like this. And Remus had been feeling pain most of his life. "Come and sit down. Cup of tea?"

"Cup of tea." Sirius parroted back.

Remus nodded, slowly, then led him into the kitchen.

“Thank you.” Sirius said, after a little while, “Sorry, I... I keep forgetting things.”

Remus touched his arm, gently,

“It’s ok. Go and sit. I’ll be a minute, you can hear me from the living room.”

Sirius left, silently. Remus breathed a sigh of relief - the atmosphere was still thick with memory, and hurt, and Azkaban, but at least it was bearable when Sirius wasn’t standing *right there* .

Last year, in the shack, Remus hadn’t had time to feel anything other than terror and joy. And, typically, he had spent the rest of his time since trying to pretend none of it had happened at all. Not because he’d wanted to, but because it was the only thing he *could* do. He should have known better; should have known that Sirius always demanded confrontation.

He took a long time over the tea, brewing it in a pot, rather than the electric kettle. How did Sirius take his tea? He couldn’t remember. Maybe he had never known - Sirius usually made it, back then. In the end, Remus simply put out everything, setting up a tray with immaculate attention and care, as if he was serving the queen. Slice of lemon. Little jug of milk. Bowl of brown sugar lumps. There weren’t any biscuits left, Grant had had the last of the digestives.

When it was all ready, he still hadn’t the nerve to carry it through. He panicked for a moment, before hearing the door click open. Had it been half an hour already?

““Orrright?!” Grant’s brash, overloud cockney accent filled the flat, warming it instantly. He acted as if there was nothing at all out of the ordinary as he bustled into the living room, laden with food.

Remus could hear him setting it all out on the coffee table, unwrapping cartons of egg fried rice, sweet and sour chicken, chow mein, pork balls, chinese ribs, spring rolls; all the while chatting away to Sirius,

“Blimey, don’t you look better after a wash, eh? Still got that nice thick hair. Jealous, I’ll be bald by the time I’m forty, reckon. Seen how grey Remus is? Looks distinguished, I tell ‘im, but ‘e don’t listen...”

Fortified, Remus lifted the tray and carried it into the living room. Sirius was sitting primly on the edge of the couch, staring at Grant the way an animal stares at a potential predator.

“I’ll grab plates...” Grant said, passing Remus on his way back to the kitchen. He didn’t make eye contact. Remus didn’t blame him. The situation wasn’t fair on anyone; least of all Grant.

Remus tried to smile at Sirius, offering the tea tray. “Here we are.” He murmured.

Sirius looked at the tea, the lemon, the sugar, then down at his hands.

“Are you hungry?” Remus asked, “Is this all right?”

Sirius nodded. “Lovely, thanks. You shouldn’t go to all this trouble.”

“Nonsense.”

Grant brought in the plates. They sat around the coffee table, Sirius on the sofa, Remus in the armchair, and Grant on the floor. Sirius put food on his plate and picked at it like a bird. He didn’t use the forks they’d put out, or the chopsticks that came with the meal, he used his hands to eat,

tearing everything into small pieces and feeding them into his mouth. Remus and Grant politely ignored it, making light conversation.

"I'll have to do a proper shop, on my way back from work tomorrow," Grant said. "Get you a toothbrush, some things like that."

"I can do that," Remus said. He was keen to take care of Sirius himself; as if he'd brought home a stray he ought to be responsible for. He looked at Sirius, "Your clothes and books are boxed up in the garage. I'll go and have a look tomorrow."

"You kept them?" Sirius looked up, almost hopefully, "You kept my things?"

"Er. Well, after everything, Mary showed up and did it for me. I wasn't... I wasn't very well, for a while. I'm not sure what state they're in, I haven't been there since."

"I didn't expect you to keep anything."

Remus didn't know what to say, so he shrugged. It hadn't really been a case of wanting to hang onto Sirius's stuff; more that he'd just hidden it away so he didn't have to think about it. He was glad now, obviously, but he didn't want any more credit than he was due.

They finished eating, and Sirius wiped his greasy hands on the legs of his pyjama bottoms, and Remus tried not to wince. Sirius used to be so fastidious about cleanliness - Remus's disorganisation had always irritated him. Another change.

Grant got up to collect the plates and cutlery for washing up. Sirius sat up, "I can do that, let me," he withdrew a wand from his baggy sleeve.

"Where did you get that?" Remus asked, frowning.

"Stole it," Sirius looked down, turning it in his hand, "Took a while to get used to, but I can handle it ok now. Here, let me..."

"It's fine," Grant said. He was smiling, but you couldn't hear it in his voice. "I'd prefer to do it normally." He turned, carrying the pile of plates into the kitchen.

"*Muffliato* ." Sirius muttered. Remus blinked, surprised. He hadn't heard that spell in a very long time, and he had never, ever used something like that with Grant present. It felt disloyal, sneaky. "Is the floo connection working?" Sirius asked, urgently.

"No," Remus said. "I never re-connected. I don't actually do very much magic at home, because--"

"Yeah, because of the muggle," Sirius finished, and Remus could have sworn he rolled his eyes. "He's made a lot of changes, I see." He gave the TV a very pointed look.

"It's his home too," Remus said, defensively.

"Whatever, I don't care. Right, we'll need to re-connect it. If I'm staying here, that is. We'll need to be able to communicate with the rest of the Order."

"The rest of the--"

--have you got an owl?" Sirius glanced around.

"No," Remus said. He chewed his lip, "I've got a phone." He offered, trying to lighten the mood.

“For merlin’s sake, Moony!” Sirius barked, his rough voice crackling with urgency, “What have you been *doing* all these years, moping about?!”

Remus flinched - both at being called Moony, which nobody ever did, and at the cruel accusation.

“I’ve been surviving.” He said, trying to stay calm, “How easy do you think it is for me to hold down a job? And it’s not as if I’ve had anyone I need to keep in touch with.”

Sirius didn’t say anything, but pursed his lips and scowled, staring at the carpet. Remus sighed, closing his eyes. “Look,” he said, gently, “I can imagine how you must feel. I know you want to do everything at once, now you’re free, but let’s just take things slowly tonight, ok? Get a proper night’s sleep and we’ll work on a plan tomorrow.”

Sirius nodded, mollified. Remus felt proud of himself. He hadn’t cried, or shouted, and that was pretty good progress, at least as far as Sirius Black was concerned. Grant re-entered the room, and Remus quickly undid the *muffliato* charm.

“Shall I stick the telly on?” He asked the silent room. Remus nodded. Sirius returned to scowling.

The news was on, and then the weather. Then some American hospital drama, which made Grant tut and switch over. There was a documentary on about Fleetwood Mac, which they all vaguely watched. No one really spoke, except Grant every now and then.

Remus was in turmoil, his brain whirring into overdrive as too many conflicting thoughts and feeling flashed past. It had been so long since he’d been in the same room as Sirius, and now they couldn’t even talk to each other without hitting some immeasurable barrier, whether it was the war, or lost friends, or their mutual betrayal. And now the order was reforming, and it looked like everyone expected Remus to sign himself up, once again, without hesitation. But he wasn’t the boy he’d been last time. He was old, and he was tired. He had other responsibilities - he had *Grant* .

At about ten o’clock, Sirius yawned.

“Yeah, me too.” Grant commented, yawning back. “Got work in the morning, maybe it’s time for bed.” He looked at Remus, obviously hoping for some sort of direction.

“Yeah,” Remus said, uncertain. He placed his hands on the arms of his chair to push himself up, stiff from sitting so rigidly all evening. “Um. Sirius, are you ok here? I’ll get you a cushion and a duvet.”

“No need.” Sirius said. He stretched again, and transformed into Padfoot. Grant breathed in, sharply, at the surprise, but said nothing. The big black dog curled up on the couch and closed its eyes.

“Can you do that?” Grant whispered, half an hour later, once he and Remus were both in bed. “Turn into a wolf whenever you like?”

“No.” Remus said. “He’s an animagus. He learnt how to do it. I’m werewolf, I got bitten, I don’t get a choice.”

“Bad luck.” Grant said, “Mind you, don’t think I’d like it much, if you could.”

“He won’t hurt you, he’s still got his normal mind when he’s a dog.” Though Remus wasn’t sure what Sirius’s ‘normal mind’ was like, anymore. Everything else about him was rumpled and damaged in some way.

“Are you ok?” Grant said, turning his head to watch Remus’s face.

“I think so.” Remus said, honestly, “But it’s weird. It’s going to be difficult, I think.”

“How long will he be here?”

“Oh. I don’t know. A while, maybe. He’s talking about... about another war. I might need to help.”

“Remus...”

“I know, I know,” Remus screwed up his face. “I’m sorry, the whole situation is... it’s a fucking nightmare, really. I need some time to think.”

“I wish I could help.” Grant said. “I wish I understood.”

“You’re so good with Sirius.” Remus offered, “I don’t know what to say to him, he’s so... I dunno, prickly. I’m scared I’ll say something wrong and he’ll bite my head off.”

“Hmm, well I have a bit of experience with those types.” Grant said, his lips curling, “Anyway, he’s obviously been through the mill. Just gotta be patient. Kind. You can’t force him to get better, I’m afraid.”

* * *

Sirius slept for a very long time. Long after Grant had left for work, and Remus had eaten breakfast and marked a few exam papers. He stayed in the kitchen, but he could see the living room couch through the door, just in case.

It was almost half past eleven when Padfoot jerked awake, and began barking loudly, leaping off the couch.

“Shh!” Remus ran into the living room anxiously, “Sirius, it’s me! You’re here, you’re with me!”

The dog stopped, cocked its head, then transformed back into Sirius. His eyes were wide and his jaw shadowy with stubble. He looked like a mad person. Remus tried to be patient, and kind, like Grant said. “Sorry,” he said, steadying his voice, “It’s just that we’re not allowed pets, here, and if the neighbours hear you...”

“Sorry.” Sirius looked down, embarrassed. “You’d think I’d be used to it now. Been out for a year.”

“It’s fine.” Remus shook his head, “Sorry I shouted.”

Things stayed that awkward for most of the day. They went out to the garage after Sirius had eaten breakfast.

The door took a few goes to heave open, and Sirius had to stay in dog form while they were out of the flat, so it fell to Remus. Still, they got in eventually, and everything was very much as they remembered. No motorbike, of course, though all the tools were still there. Sirius’s clothes and books were neatly stacked in labelled boxes, without so much as a layer of dust on them.

“Mary must have done some sort of preserving spell,” Remus commented.

Sirius nodded vaguely, walking through the piles of relics like an ancient monk. He selected a few things to take back to the flat - or rather, for Remus to carry back. Sirius chose robes and wizard

clothes, none of his muggle stuff, not even his old leather jacket, which Remus found stuffed inside a box under some records. He had to resist the urge to bury his face in it and inhale the gorgeous scent; as if the jacket had more of Sirius in it than the man standing next to him.

Back at the flat, Sirius changed into the robes at once. Remus could see why - he looked much better already, in his own things, having had a few good meals and a proper wash. His hair was a bit straggly, and still had knots in it despite the fact that he'd clearly used half a bottle of shampoo on it.

He slept again, after lunch. Remus didn't see how, he'd only been awake a few hours. Still, despite Sirius's inability to stay still, he exhausted easily. He curled up on the couch again, in the nest of blankets he'd created, and Remus sat beside him with the TV on very low. At least when Sirius slept he was a dog, and therefore easier to share a room with.

He was grumpy, when he woke up. He squinted at the TV, then at Remus.

"Don't you read any more?"

"Of course I do." Remus gestured at the bookcases either side of the fireplace, which were sagging under the weight. "TV is just background noise."

Sirius grunted, sitting up and straightening his clothes. He ran his fingers through his hair, and they got caught. He winced.

"Do you want to try washing it again?" Remus asked, "If you put loads of conditioner on, then comb it through, that might help?"

He remembered Grant telling him that about two brothers who'd come to the remand centre. They'd been neglected, and had never had their hair cut or brushed, and they were frightened of the clippers. Grant remembered Matron's brutal buzz cuts, and he immediately promised them he wouldn't cut their hair. He'd spent hours gently combing it through, instead, and his hands were wet and cold for so long his eczema flared up and his palms were rough and chapped for weeks.

Sirius seemed to appreciate the suggestion, so Remus went to run the bath. Sirius followed him. He didn't seem to want to be left alone at all, even if he didn't want to talk.

Remus rooted around in the medicine cabinet for a good strong comb, and some scissors, just in case. He set them on the edge of the bathtub, and stepped back. "Er... shall I leave you to it?" He asked, as the bathwater steamed gently. Sirius rubbed his arm, looking around.

"No I think I'd rather... if you don't mind?"

"Anything you like," Remus said. *Let him lead the way*, Grant had suggested. *Go with the flow*. He thought about turning around as Sirius undressed, but that seemed redundant if he was staying in the room, and anyway, Sirius had no scruples about stripping off in front of him. There was nothing sensual about it; he did it in the same way he now ate with his hands, or wiped his mouth with his sleeve, or curled up tightly on the sofa; he did it because he had forgotten how to act around other people.

He was so thin, so frail, his elbows jutted out like knives and his hollow ribs moved under his paper white skin. His once warm, slender wrists, which Remus had adored, were now so narrow they looked like they'd snap as he lowered himself into the bath.

Remus pretended to be tidying the bathroom, and started folding up the flannel hanging off the side of the sink, straightening the towels slung over the radiator. He was embarrassed, he didn't want to

stare. Though, to be honest, Sirius probably wouldn't notice, either way.

Eventually, Remus sat on the closed toilet lid, crossing his legs in an effort to look nonchalant - and because the bathroom was much too small for his annoying gangly body. Sirius leaned back into the hot water, making small slow waves slop gently against the plastic sides of the tub. He closed his eyes, and tilted his head back into the water, exposing his throat, his adam's apple protruding.

Remus had to remember to close his mouth as Sirius resurfaced, opening his eyes and sweeping his hair back. Now it was wet, the grey had vanished, and he became suddenly younger, more recognisable.

He started lathering his hair with the shampoo, sitting up, leaning forward. Remus watched his bony white fingers clawing through the foam, and remembered how graceful Sirius had been as a young man, how every movement was perfectly weighted, how he used to treat his own body with such tenderness. The steam from the hot water stung Remus's eyes, and he had to blink away tears.

Sirius rinsed out the shampoo, then started on the conditioner, using loads of it, Remus would have to buy more.

"We ought to make a list." Sirius said, abruptly.

"What?" Remus frowned.

"A list." Sirius said, picking up the comb. "We ought to make one. People to get in contact with, for Dumbledore."

"For Dumbledore." Remus repeated. He suddenly felt very tired.

"Yeah, he said get in touch with the old crowd. Only my memory's shot, so you'll have to help. The names, you know." He tugged the comb through his knots, hard.

"You really want to go right back to war, don't you?" Remus said.

Sirius turned and gave him a look of disbelief, and with a horrible sinking feeling Remus realised that in Sirius's mind the war had never ended.

"Look," Remus tried to explain, "It's not that I don't believe in the cause, it's just... I remember how it went last time."

"As if I don't!" Sirius hissed, yanking at the comb in his hair, "I haven't been on holiday for twelve years!"

"No, I know, but..." Remus wished he'd stop saying it like that. *Twelve years*. What forgiveness could there ever be, for that?

"It's all we can do." Sirius said, fiercely, "It's the only thing that matters." He raised the comb again, looking as if he was about to stab himself with it, rather than groom himself. Remus couldn't stand it.

"Stop that," he said, getting up. "You'll rip all your bloody hair out, come on. Let me do it."

He rolled up a towel and put it on the floor to kneel on, grabbing the comb out of Sirius's hand. Sirius looked at him warily for a moment, and Remus realised that they had not been this close yet - they had hugged, in the Shack a year ago, but that had been pure adrenaline. It had not been intimate. This was.

"May I?" Remus asked, softening his voice.

Sirius nodded, slowly, then turned his head, so that Remus could reach. Leaning in, not too much, Remus began to work, sliding his fingers carefully through the slick black locks, gently easing the comb through in sections from the bottom up. Slowly, slowly, the knots began to loosen, giving way to that familiar old silken texture.

It was difficult work, and took a lot of patience, and the rest of the bottle of conditioner, but Remus finally felt like he was helping; he was in control and he was doing something positive. Sirius was so quiet and still the whole time; tense at first, but gradually relaxing, bit by bit - Remus could practically see his tendons slackening.

Once he was finished, Remus leaned back to survey his work, the muscles in his back ached like they were on fire, but it was worth it. He stood up, shakily, a hand on the sink. Sirius raised his hands, moved them gingerly over his head, fingers skimming the smooth surface.

"Thanks."

"Any time." Remus smiled, sitting back on the loo seat.

Sirius rinsed his hair a few more times, then climbed out and dried himself, getting dressed again. Remus expected him to look at himself in the mirror, but he didn't, he purposefully avoided it, keeping his eyes down.

Back in the living room, Remus made them tea and some cheese on toast, because he wanted Sirius to eat as often as possible. He expected Sirius to fall asleep again, but he didn't. He took some paper from Remus's pile of exams, and flipped it over, picking up a biro too.

"Ok," he said, "Moody, obviously, top of the list - after he's recovered of course, wait til you hear what happened to him at Hogwarts! Then the Weasley's, and Mary..."

"No, not Mary." Remus said. "She won't... she's settled down, she's got kids. And the Weasley's, they've got *seven* kids, Sirius, you can't ask that of people..."

"I don't need to." Sirius said, sharply. "They'll do what's right."

"I can't see it that way." Remus said, "All I can see is the cost of another war..."

"We don't have a choice!"

"I know, I know, I just want us to *think*, before we--"

What's happened to you, Remus?! This isn't like you. You're supposed to be a Gryffindor!"

That struck a nerve. How *dare* he!?

"Quite a bit has happened to me, actually." Remus said, acidly. "I lost everyone I ever cared about in the last war, so forgive me if I'm not thrilled about marching straight into battle again. I'm not twenty-one any more."

Sirius shook his head, still unable to comprehend. "We *owe* it to them! To Lily and James!"

"I don't owe them anything!" Remus shouted, his face burning with anger, "Maybe *you* feel like you do, 'secret keeper', but if you recall, I wasn't fucking consulted on that one!"

He didn't know why he said it; it just all came tumbling out before he could stop himself. He hasn't

realised how angry he really was, until that moment. Clearly Sirius hadn't, either,

“Moony--”

“Don’t you dare call me ‘Moony’! Don’t act like we’re still... like nothing’s changed! Like everything’s fine, and I’m just going to do everything you say!”

He stood up, he needed to get out, he needed a break. He turned on his heel, heading for the door.

“No, Remus, please!” Sirius cried out, his voice so taut and strangled, it frightened Remus. He turned back. Sirius stared up at him from the couch, so small and wide eyed. “Please don't leave me alone.” He said.

Remus relented, his temper draining away to nothing. He returned to his armchair, and sat down again. He pursed his lips. He rubbed his eyes. “I won't,” he said, wearily. “I'm not going anywhere.”

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'The Man Who Sold The World' by David Bowie. One of his best.

Summer 1995: Grant

Chapter Summary

Ooooooh, PoV shift!

Couldn't let my best beloved character go without letting him speak for himself.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A long time ago

I watched him struggle with the sea.

I knew that he was drowning,

And I brought him into me

Now today

Come morning light

He sails away

After one last night

I let him go.

Mr Chapman,

We are very pleased to extend the following offer of employment to you on behalf of Brighton & Hove City Council:

Social Worker - Child and Youth Welfare

Please see the attached brochure for details on your salary and working hours. You have thirty working days to respond to this offer, by either post or telephone.

We look forward to hearing from you.

A.P. Green

Head of Social Services, Brighton & Hove.

Grant read the letter three times, just to make sure.

Well. He really ought to be happy. Thrilled. This was amazing news. News worth celebrating. It

was one way out of the mess he currently found himself in, anyway.

He shook his head, feeling terrible for thinking of Remus's life a 'mess'. Even if that was a little bit true.

He had gone down for the interview a few weeks ago, telling Remus he was working late. Not that he wanted to hide anything from Remus - more like he just didn't want to jinx things. Grant wasn't a very lucky person, generally; stuff like this never, ever happened to him.

Grant didn't believe in god, or guardian angels, or Buddha or Brahman - or *anything* other than his own willpower, but something about this job offer smacked of divine intervention. This was his dream job, after all. Perhaps this was the sign he was waiting for - as if old ex-boyfriends returning from prison wasn't enough of an omen.

He'd been toying with the idea of moving for years. Grant loved London; it would always be in his blood, but they were both in their mid-thirties now, and maybe it was time for a change. He wanted to get Remus out to the countryside, to fresh air and sea and space. A fresh start, away from the miserable little flat. So when the position came up, and Grant's manager mentioned it to him, he leapt at the chance.

Of course; that was all before Sirius came back.

Grant re-read the letter again, from the top. He stared at his name, in official black and white printed text. *A letter with my name on it, and it's not even a court summons*, he joked to himself. He wished he could show his dickhead grandfather. Show him what nancy-boy delinquents can amount to when they put their minds to it.

He was proud of himself, and no matter what the situation was right now, he knew Remus would be proud of him too. He wished he could tell him straight away, but Remus was out, and Grant was hiding in the bedroom from Sirius.

Grant was supposed to be keeping an eye on him, he'd promised, but as soon as Remus was out the door, Sirius had said something nasty about not needing a 'nursemaid' (bloody hell, how posh was he?!) and turned into a dog again.

It was so painfully obvious that Black hated Grant's guts, so hiding out in the bedroom felt like the best solution.

He'd have to wait for Remus to get home, then, to break the news. He hoped it wouldn't be too long, but he had no idea, really. Remus had gone to some sort of meeting, and hadn't given Grant any details.

He'd talked to Sirius about it, though - at length. They muttered together in the living room, thinking Grant wouldn't notice. The pitch of their whispering swung wildly to and fro - one moment angry staccato hissing, the next soothing, low apologies. Their body language was the same - Grant learnt quickly that the important stuff between Sirius and Remus was the stuff neither of them said out loud. It was all in looks, gestures, tilted heads and raised eyebrows. Impossible for an outsider to keep up with - and Grant felt very much the outsider. He had never known two people could be simultaneously so angry with each other and so much in love.

And it *was* love. Without a doubt.

Grant got a sick feeling in his stomach. He'd been ignoring it for days.

Remus had been different for a while, but until that bloody black dog showed up Grant had thought

there might be hope for recovery. A bit more time, a bit of space, some distance from all that darkness. Grant would pull Remus back from the edge; he had done it before, he could do it again.

But now it looked impossible - Remus did not want things back the way they were. He hadn't said it - maybe he didn't know it - but it was very obvious to Grant.

Look, ok, Grant *knew* he was not the brightest bulb in the box. Not as clever as Remus, anyway. Probably not as clever as Sirius. That had never bothered him much, because after all, he couldn't *be* anyone but himself, and he had plenty else going for him. He worked hard, and he cared about people, and people cared about him, and those things were ingredients for a very happy life, in Grant's opinion.

So, he wasn't a genius, but he did know *some* things. He liked to think that at the very least, he knew when it was time to make a graceful exit.

Grant loved Remus very much. He'd probably loved him ever since that first day, twenty years ago, when the lanky, exhausted, skittish teenager had loped into the dorm room at St Edmund's.

He was so quiet, and so closed up, even though there was clearly a universe inside of him. Remus was never the same person twice; he was jaded and world-weary one moment, naive and blushing the next. He was bubbling with rage and love at the same time, and *most* of the time he let love win.

Grant liked to think he'd had a bit of a hand in that. Especially over the past few years - Grant had worked hard to keep the softest parts of Remus safe. And he had; he'd done a good job. He'd taken care of him, until Remus didn't really need taking care of anymore. It was perhaps time to let go.

He still didn't want to just hand him back like a borrowed book.

Grant had said goodbye to plenty of people over the course of his short yet colourful life, and not one of them had meant a thing, until Remus. Grant knew how pathetic that sounded. Nearing thirty-six, and only one real relationship - only one true friendship.

Whatever happened, they would stay friends - there was no question of that. But Grant knew he had to be practical, and he had to look after himself, for once. Remus had always belonged to another world; that was partly what made him so attractive.

The time had come for Remus to go back where he belonged, and though Grant knew that for a while the absence would hurt, it was completely necessary.

It reminded him of that Suzanne Vega song - Grant was never one for reading too much into lyrics, not like Remus - he didn't have a poetic soul. But when the *Solitude Standing* album came out, it had been all over the radio, and Grant quite liked it - he always meant to buy the album, but never got around to it. She had a haunting voice, and this one particular tune was ghostly and strange.

Then Remus had told him what it was about, and he hated it.

He didn't usually like fairy tales - having recognised his sexuality at the age of six, the idea of brave knights rescuing damsels in distress had never inspired him much. But something about Calypso really struck a nerve.

He knew *he* wasn't a siren, sitting on the rocks jiggling his tits at passing sailors, but he knew Remus. He knew Remus inside out. He'd seen the change in him, since Sirius came back.

At first, Remus had clung to Grant as his protector, which made sense; a bit of regression was

probably to be expected, and Grant had always done his best to be solid ground for Remus. But after the stress of the first few days had passed, Remus and Sirius had both relaxed a little bit, and everything was different. So different it was shocking.

Grant hadn't really known what their relationship was like when they were young, but he caught glimpses of it now. The way Remus *stared* at Sirius, as if he was the most gorgeous creature on earth. The heat in his eyes, the way his tongue played in the corner of his mouth, like he was daydreaming something utterly filthy. Remus had never looked at Grant like that, not really.

And Sirius lit up, when Remus spoke to him.

Yes, they were obviously still in love, and it was not the same kind of love Grant and Remus had. He didn't know if it was better or not, but he could practically feel the conflict tearing Remus apart. He didn't *want* to tear Remus apart; he never had. He still wanted to keep him safe.

And there was Sirius himself - prim and poisonous, lurking like a spider all the time, glaring daggers whenever Grant entered the room. He made his feelings perfectly clear, and it made Grant indignant, made him want to fight harder to keep Remus.

But that wasn't up to Grant, any more. Remus was going somewhere Grant couldn't follow him. They'd reached a crossroads, and it was all very clear. Maybe the letter really was an omen.

He conjured up the image he'd been toying with - of him and Remus, in a house by the sea, reading books and eating breakfast in bed and going for walks into town. Getting older, making new friends. If they had a big enough house, they could begin fostering - Grant had been interested in doing that for years; he wanted to take care of kids no one else wanted, and if he was going to be a social worker then he'd be a perfect candidate.

He let the fantasy wash over him one last time, and then he began to dismantle it. Because deep down Grant knew that Remus would never have left London, anyway, and Remus would never want to foster children - he'd be too afraid he'd hurt them on a full moon. That future had always been a bit of wishful thinking; it was more about Grant than Remus.

It was time to stop worrying about Remus, and what Remus needed. That wasn't his responsibility any more. Perhaps there would be someone else for Grant - he hoped so, he would never stop looking. Perhaps someone would want to keep him safe, for a change. Stranger things happened at sea.

The decision was made. Grant wrote a formal response, accepting the job offer. He'd post it on his way out.

He began to pack quietly, hoping that Remus wouldn't come home until he was finished. There was so much to do - but at the same time, not a lot. Grant found himself surprised by just how easily the plan came together. He had his own bank account, and he didn't have any stake in the flat - he could stay at his aunt's pub down in Hove until he found his own place to live. He even had friends in Brighton, from when he'd lived there as a kid. *Easy peasy lemon-squeezy*.

So once he'd packed, he'd just need to say goodbye. He hoped he could say it the right way, and not sound bitter or self-pitying. He hoped Remus would understand that Grant would always be there if he needed him; he'd come running in a heartbeat.

At the same time he hoped that Remus would not need him. He hoped that he was leaving him in safe hands.

Finished packing, Grant sat on the bed. He could hear the TV in the other room, up a bit too loud. Sirius left it on all night, sometimes, and it woke Grant up. But if he went through to turn it off, that hideous black dog would wake up and start growling at him in the dark. Probably a trauma thing; Grant didn't blame Sirius, but he wished it didn't have to manifest like that.

Could he really trust a man like that to take care of anyone? Grant's heart ached as he imagined Remus - sweet, serious, sensitive Remus - being treated like a mental punching bag. He would just put up with it, Grant could tell; Remus felt so guilty about Sirius's imprisonment that he was willing to take all sorts of abuse for it. But that wasn't right.

Grant stood up. He had to do one more thing, then, before he could leave.

He had to talk to Sirius.

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'Calypso' by Suzanne Vega.

Summer 1995: Sirius

Chapter Summary

And just one more person's perspective...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Well, my friends are gone and my hair is grey

I ache in the places where I used to play

And I'm crazy for love.

But I'm not coming on.

I'm just paying my rent every day in the Tower of Song.

Sirius sat curled up on the couch, his arms around his legs. He was watching television. It was a bizarre muggle invention - a bit like the cinemas he'd been to in his youth, only smaller... *oh no, oh no* ... that brought back a memory of James. That summer they'd gone to see the same film every day, and met those muggle girls. Had it been summer? Or Christmas? It might have been raining, and someone punched him. James or Remus? Surely Remus; James was never violent, even when Sirius really deserved it.

Sirius shut his eyes to drown out the cold, cruel voices in his head which wanted to drag him back through time, back to the very worst moments. He thought he could taste blood, but when he opened his eyes again, all he saw was the living room, and the silly talking muggle box.

It was his living room. Or it had been, once. It looked different, and Sirius had a hard time working out whether it was different, or he was just remembering wrong. The walls hadn't been repainted, the fireplace was there. It didn't stink of cigarette ash anymore, but there was still a burn mark in the carpet under the windowsill - had that been there before? Or had it happened in the years between?

The TV was the worst change; the most noticeable. Sirius had a strong memory of arguing against having one, a long time ago. Noisy, ugly muggle light-boxes. He still thought it was awful, but somehow he couldn't bring himself to stop watching it. It distracted him. It was a break from thinking; from remembering.

He had spent too much of his life remembering. Turning over events, over mistakes and half understood conversations. Sifting through it all again and again, until everything in his head was shaken loose in tiny fragments, no structure or narrative. He didn't want to sit and think anymore. He wanted to act. He wanted to do. And no one would let him.

He huffed, shifting position, tightening his grip on the arm of the couch. Remus had been invited to a meeting, and Sirius had been told to stay at home with the muggle. It would have been fine if

he'd gone as Padfoot, he knew it would have, but no one would listen. They were treating him like a loose cannon, like someone who needed to be *contained*. As if he hadn't spent a whole year alone, looking out for himself, without any help from anyone.

He wasn't going to be treated like a kid. He wasn't going to let them. Hadn't he earned his place?

But Moony - Remus, he had given Sirius that pained, pleading look, and it shut him up. He hated making Remus uncomfortable, it made him worried he would never get better. He knew he wasn't right in the head, he knew he was going about things all wrong, and that he was not himself. But Sirius had hoped a year would be enough. He was out, now, he was free, everyone who mattered finally knew the truth. It should make a difference. He should be normal again, by now.

Remus wasn't helping, Sirius thought, darkly. How *could* he get his head straight, when everything was so weird? When Remus, his only friend left, could barely look at him without wincing, could barely speak to him without trailing off, glancing away. And the boyfriend. Sirius wondered how quickly that had happened, how soon the muggle had wormed his way in. Infected Remus with his mundanity; made his Moony quiet and cautious. No better than a muggle himself.

It was like a light in Remus had dimmed. Sirius looked for signs of the old Moony, but there was none of that wicked, mischievous energy, the blistering strength of Remus Lupin when he had an exciting plan.

It had taken Sirius ages to convince Remus just to go to the meeting. In the end, he had the impression Remus only went as a favour to him; to keep him calm. That was fine, as long as he went. And when he got back, he would tell Sirius everything, Sirius would make him. It was the least Remus could do.

Remus would come around. He would see there was no other way. He would want to do it for Harry.

Sirius couldn't help smiling to himself, thinking about Harry. That incredible, brilliant, brave kid. James would be so proud...

James, James I'm so sorry....

He shuddered, shut his eyes again, bracing himself against the cold. He wanted Remus so badly. He didn't want to be alone, not again, please...

"Orright?" Grant, sauntered the room as if to remind Sirius that he was not alone at all. Grant smiled at him cheerfully as he came in. Sirius watched him warily. *Always bloody smiling. Weirdo*.

"Good afternoon," Sirius replied, deliberately accentuating his annunciation to counter Grant's horrific butchered English.

Sirius had spent no time whatsoever with muggles, even before Azkaban, and found them confusing at best; like an alien species. And he *hated* Grant's cheerfulness with every inch of his being.

"Feelin' better?"

Sirius grunted noncommittally. He didn't see that he owed any kind of explanation to this man. He tolerated him, for Remus's sake, but that was it.

"Good to hear," Grant nodded, dimples in his cheeks.

Sirius thought he must be incredibly stupid.

Wipe that inane grin off your face! barked the spectre of Walpurga Black.

Sirius remembered Grant as a teenager, and he hadn't even been that good looking then. Fifteen years hadn't improved on his hairline or his skin. Sirius had no idea what Remus was still doing with Grant at all, and if he was stupid as well as plain looking, then Sirius was even more baffled as to why Moony would want him around.

The Remus *he* knew - *his* Remus would never suffer a fool.

"When he gets back," Grant was saying, now, still cheerful, still smiling, showing crooked teeth and a white scar in the corner of his mouth, "I'll go."

"Oh, ok." Sirius shrugged. He searched for something to say, "...we need milk."

"No," Grant chuckled, shaking his head lightly. He sat on the coffee table, directly opposite Sirius - so close their knees almost touched - and looked him in the eye, "I'm not popping out to the shops - I mean I'm leaving."

"What?" Sirius frowned, "Why? Did Remus tell you to? Because it wasn't my idea."

"It's my idea," Grant said, no longer smiling. He had tired eyes, and Sirius realised that though Grant was smiling, he wasn't happy. He was very, very sad. Sirius didn't know what to do about it; he had his own problems.

Grant kept talking, "I realised it a while ago. When he came back from the school, all shook up from seeing you again. I think I must've known then. Should 'ave called time, but I couldn't just leave him alone..."

"Look, I don't know what you think--"

"I was only ever looking after him for you," Grant said, raising a hand to keep Sirius quiet, "I was never it for him. That's been you, all these years."

"And yet here you are." Sirius muttered. He drew his knees back up, closing inwards. He wanted Grant to just go away, if he was leaving; *get lost*. He'd have liked to transform into Padfoot, but he knew it wouldn't help matters and he'd promised Remus not to.

"See, now this is what I wanted to talk about." Grant said, his brows knitting together. "If I go, then you've got to look after him, ok? Not blame him for whatever's happened to you in the last ten years."

"*Twelve* years." Sirius corrected.

"Don't care," Grant shrugged, "It's not been an easy life for any of us, sunshine, you're not special. *Remus is*."

Grant's voice was suddenly hard and dangerous - almost aggressive "He's special to *me*, and if you're not man enough to be kind to him, then you don't deserve him. He's been waiting for you. He's never stopped waiting. He won't say it, because Remus doesn't say stuff like that. But he feels it. He feels *everything*, you must know that."

Sirius didn't reply.

"He loves you." Grant said, steadily. "You have to love him back."

"I *do* love hi--"

--No," Grant was shaking his head again, "No, not like this. You have to be *here* ; a real, flesh and blood person. Not a dog. Not a ghost."

Sirius couldn't meet Grant's eyes anymore, he bowed his head and nodded.

"I will."

"Good," Grant smiled again, his face gentle once more. "Now, when he gets moody - and he *will* get moody - don't let him mope, and don't let him drink. He'll want it, after a full moon, but it only takes him longer to get well again if he does."

"I know what he needs after a full moon!" Sirius growled, affronted. "I've known him since I was *eleven* , who do you think you are, telling me--"

"I'm the one who's been here." Grant returned, shortly. "I don't think you get how hard it's been. I don't think you... look; you had him at his best, ok? I had his worst." He smiled, a little, "And I was glad to do it. I have one part of him. You have the other. Can we agree?"

Sirius stared at him a bit longer. Grant held out a hand to shake, and Sirius took it,

"Ok." he said.

"Lovely." Grant released him, and stood up. He went into the bedroom and came back with a large hold all, which he placed very purposefully by the door. "Going to have to leave a few books and things here for a bit." He said, "But I'll be back for 'em when I'm settled. S'pose you don't need a key, eh? Can you get in the magic way?"

Sirius nodded, struck dumb. He couldn't believe this was happening. He wanted his heart to soar, he wanted to feel finally satisfied - but he couldn't help worrying. Grant had been a nuisance, but he had been a buffer, too. Would Remus blame him for it? Would he convince Grant to stay, or even worse, would he leave Sirius here, alone with the flat and the war and...

There was a quiet shuffling noise outside the front door, and Sirius's ears pricked. Remus was back! His heart began to thrum against his ribcage, he licked his lips and sat up straighter, focussed in the door as it opened.

Remus entered, head bowed, frowning a bit. Sirius couldn't believe how little Remus had changed, when everything else in the world was so different now. He was greyer, but he was still Moony, he was still completely devastatingly handsome and completely unphased about it.

He gave Sirius a smile as he came in, which was so like the teenage Remus, it took Sirius right back to Hogwarts - arriving at the breakfast table to find Remus already there, on his third helping of bacon and eggs, grinning at something stupid Sirius had just said. *See* , he told himself, *there are still some good memories left.*

"Hello," he said, to the room.

"Hiya." Grant replied. "Cup of tea?"

"Ooh, yes please," Remus nodded, now giving Grant a friendly smile. The muggle went into the kitchen.

“How did it go?” Sirius asked, already agitated, “Did you see Dumbledore? What did he say?”

“Oh, nothing much. Nothing I haven't heard before. The Order needs a new HQ, we're all supposed to come up with ideas. Look, let's talk about it later?” Remus shot a glance at the kitchen, where Grant was making the tea.

“Did he say anything about me? Dumbledore? How's Harry?”

“Harry's perfectly fine, back at his aunt and uncle's for the summer. What's this bag doing here?”

Remus was looking down at the brown hold all packed with Grant's things. He looked at Sirius. Sirius shrugged, slouching down in the sofa. Remus frowned, and called out, “Grant? What's this bag doing?”

Grant popped his head around the kitchen door, looking sheepish.

“Ah. Can I have a quick word?”

Remus paled, visibly, and went into the kitchen.

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'Tower of Song' by Leonard Cohen.

And this was the penultimate chapter.

'Til the End

Chapter Summary

Here we go my loves...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I just want to see you

When you're all alone

I just want to catch you if I can

I just want to be there

When the morning light explodes

On your face it radiates

I can't escape

I love you 'till the end

I just want to tell you nothing

You don't want to hear

All I want is for you to say

Why don't you just take me

Where I've never been before

I know you want to hear me catch my breath

I love you 'till the end

I just want to be there

When we're caught in the rain

I just want to see you laugh not cry

I just want to feel you

When the night puts on it's cloak

I'm lost for words - don't tell me

All I can say

I love you 'till the end.

“Where are you going!?” Remus hissed, as he marched into the kitchen. He didn’t want Sirius to hear them fighting, but things didn’t look good at all, from the way Grant was calmly stirring his tea, not making eye contact.

“Brighton.” Grant said, “I’ve had a job offer - a really good one. Better pay, and I can help more people, I can really make a difference.”

“But we live in London.”

“Remus...”

“You’re just up and leaving me for a *job* ?!” Remus was gearing up to start shouting; to shame Grant into staying. Grant just smiled sympathetically and shook his head,

“Don’t be silly, now. You know it’s about more than that.”

Remus’s heart was beating hard, he felt sick, woozy, as if the floor was rocking back and forth.

“You can’t do this!”

“I’m just making things easier for you,” Grant said - and from anyone else that might have sounded bitter. “Haven’t I always tried to do that?”

“But I love you!”

“I love you too, my darling, but I’m not sure that’s all there is to it.”

“So you’re just making the decision for me?!”

“I’m making a decision for me.” Grant said, very firmly. He looked at Remus now, dead in the eye, and Remus could see there would be no more arguing. “Sirius needs you now, and you’ll go to war, because that’s who you are, you’re mad and brave and incredible. There isn’t a place for me in all that, so I need you to let me go. We’ll always be friends, won’t we? Care home jobs together?”

Remus wanted to wail. He wanted to fall to his knees and clutch Grant around the waist and hold him there forever, to beg and plead. He knew that was selfish. Grant was right; Remus had already decided to re-join the Order, he had decided the moment Sirius returned. It wasn’t fair to keep Grant around for that, it was downright dangerous. But he needed him, oh, he really, really needed Grant. Remus wasn’t sure he could do it all alone, not with Sirius the way he was.

“You’ll break my heart if you go now.” Remus said, aware he sounded sulky and petulant.

Grant shook his head lightly, holding his ground. “I’m sorry, love. But it’s breaking my heart to stay.”

And in an instant, Remus understood. He saw Grant properly for the first time, not as his protector, his champion, but as a person who was not so very different from him, who was just as vulnerable

to suffering.

“It’s not a proper goodbye, eh?” Grant said, softly. “You’re not shot of me yet.”

“I haven’t always been fair to you.” Remus said. He had wanted to say it for a long time now. He wanted some kind of forgiveness.

“You’ve been fine,” Grant smiled, without a trace of blame. “You’ve been my little bit of magic.”

Remus made a strangled noise, and tried not to cry. Grant hugged him, and they held each other for the last time.

Grant left Remus in the kitchen, with two cups of tea - one for Remus, one for Sirius. Remus stood in silence and waited for the door to go. When he heard it shut, he covered his mouth with his hand and closed his eyes. He breathed in and out for a few moments, then walked into the living room. Sirius was still on the couch. He looked anxious, rubbing his hands together.

“Remus, I--”

“No.” Remus held up his hand, shaking his head, “No, I need a minute.”

He went into the bedroom and closed the door. He sat on the bed and cried and cried. Once that was done with, he washed his face and went back to Sirius.

There was so much work to do.

* * *

Monday 10th July 1995

Things were harder, after Grant left. Remus felt as though he had lost his rock; the person who had kept him safe for thirteen years. The man Remus was left with was practically a stranger; a gaping hole of misery and fear and vengeful rage. Remus was on eggshells, and the war stretched ahead of them - would it always be like this?

They kept focussed on the war, mostly because Remus refused to discuss Grant, or his feelings. It was too much, in those early days. They spent their time working on lists of contacts, getting in touch with the old crowd, digging up old information from the last war. Sirius hooked them back into the floo network, using a secret connection only accessible to the right people, and time and time again the two of them knelt on the hearth rug, speaking into the flames; Sirius explaining his story to each member. Few of them took much convincing. All of them believed that Voldemort was back, and wanted to do something about it.

When they weren’t working for Dumbledore, Remus put the TV on and more often than not, Sirius would transform into Padfoot and doze off. Remus did all of the cooking - Sirius offered, but Remus wouldn’t allow it. He said he wanted Sirius to rest, to recuperate, but really he just wanted to be in a different room, most of the time. Sirius still slept on the couch, because neither of them were able to broach the subject.

“Full moon on Wednesday,” Remus said, one afternoon. They’d just signed off with Kingsley - an Auror Moody had brought in, who seemed pretty capable. Remus wasn’t sure what that was worth; he’d seen plenty of capable wizards die.

“I know.” Sirius replied, brusquely.

They sat side by side on the couch, blankly watching the TV. It was only the muggle news, but it might as well have been static, for all they cared. Just a reason not to look at each other.

"I usually leave an hour or so before sunset," Remus continued. "Gives me time to clear the area, if I need to."

"I remember how it works," Sirius said.

"Ok, sorry," Remus muttered, irritated. "Just thought you'd want to know. But if you've got other plans, then by all means, stay here."

Sirius looked at him. "Oh. You want me to come?"

"Only if you want to," Remus said, hurriedly, "I don't mind either way."

"Dumbledore said I need to stay here at all times..."

"Fine. Stay here then," Remus folded his arms tightly across his chest, feeling hurt.

"No, I'll come with you," Sirius said.

"Great," Remus drawled, sarcastically.

It was how almost all of their conversations seemed to go. One of them would deliberately misunderstand, or become unreasonably defensive about a tiny matter. Then the other would bite back, and around and around, until they both just stopped talking and ignored each other. But if Remus got up, or made to leave the room, Sirius would give him that terrified look; "*Where are you going??*" and Remus would sit back down again, and the whole scene would re-set.

He thought that bringing up the full moon might cheer Sirius up a bit. Sirius had always loved full moons, and it meant he could leave the flat for once. *Can't you just be normal?!* Remus found himself thinking, angrily, *I don't want to live with a stranger, I want my best friend back. I need help.*

Then he felt guilty. Because obviously Sirius couldn't help it, and if he really thought about it, they had always been a fractious couple; they were both hotheaded Gryffindors, after all.

Still. Sirius may not be a complete stranger, but he was certainly *strange*. Had he always been so watchful, so quick to anger? Or had Azkaban done that to him? Or - worst of all - was it all Remus's fault?

Without Grant there, Remus began to wonder whether he seemed different himself. Perhaps years of living like a muggle had made him less interesting. He was slower than he'd been as a teenager, more cautious. He rarely laughed.

It was stupid, but Remus was even more worried about how he looked. He had never been a vain person; he'd always been very ordinary looking, scarred and a bit gangly, even when Sirius had known him. But at least back then Remus had been *young*. Now, his hair was grey all over, only a few strands of the original mousey shade left. He had more scars than ever, and sometimes he still smoked, which made him cough like an old coal miner.

He was so much less than he had been before.

"This isn't going to work, is it?" Sirius said, abruptly, breaking Remus's thoughts.

No tact. Once he had been so silver tongued he could talk anyone into anything; could reel off dirty jokes like they were romantic poetry. But now everything Sirius said was sudden and blunt and full of raw urgency.

“What isn’t?” Remus asked, shaken. He kept his eyes fixed on the TV.

“This. You and me. In the same room. Trying to act like... trying to be ok with each other. After everything that’s happened, and fourteen years... it’s just going to be too much.”

Remus finally turned to look at him, ready to be annoyed again, but found that Sirius was staring down at his hands, twisting them hard in his lap so that the skin pulled and his knuckles whitened. He had scars too, now.

He didn’t look so old and strange, then; he just looked like Sirius. And he was frightened.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Remus said softly. He reached over and stilled Sirius’s hands with his own, weaving their scarred bony fingers together. He caught his eye and smiled encouragingly. “You were always too much for me. I never minded.”

The look of relief which flooded Sirius’s face was worth every lost moment. It was an entire lifetime. He raised Remus’s hand to his lips, and gently kissed the inside of his palm.

They returned to the TV after that, but kept holding hands.

* * *

Thursday 14th July

Thankfully, the full moon was a welcome change of pace. They apparated to the Brecon Beacons together, and both transformed on a mountainside. The wolf was thrilled to be reunited with its old companion, and they spent their time chasing foxes through the grasslands, running together for miles and miles. They were better together, in their canine bodies; more natural, more at ease. Perhaps the lack of inhibition, or perhaps the bond forged between them as dog and wolf was not as easily broken.

When Remus turned back, at dawn, Padfoot licked his face gleefully, nuzzling into him, and Remus laughed, for the first time since Sirius had returned to London.

They were still smiling when they got back to the flat, and it felt bigger than before; less of a cage.

“I forgot how strong you were,” Sirius beamed, full of energy, “I forgot you were faster than me.”

“Of course you did,” Remus grinned, “Arrogant prick. I could always beat you.”

He picked up the post sitting on the doormat and flicked through, as Sirius flung himself onto the couch, sprawling out. It was the first time Remus had seen him look really relaxed in their flat again, and it made him feel warm inside.

Flicking through the bills and takeaway leaflets, Remus stopped short as he reached a postcard. It had Grant’s new address on it. Nothing else, just the address, neatly printed. The needle sharp sting of regret hit Remus, and he sighed, heavily. There was no phone number. Either Grant didn’t have one yet (which seemed very unlikely, as he was barely off it normally, and needed one for work), or he was telling Remus not to get in touch.

“What’s up?” Sirius said, from the couch, ever watchful.

“Nothing. Grant’s new address, that’s all.” Remus put it on the mantelpiece. “I really need a lie down, I think I’ll go to bed.”

He downed some painkillers - only over the counter stuff, nothing exciting - and went to sleep. Luckily that was easy enough, after a full moon. When he woke up, the bedroom felt cold and empty. It was long after midday, and he could smell bacon cooking, the salty, savoury scent wafting its way through the flat.

He got up and followed the scent to the kitchen, where Sirius was standing over the hob, agitating a sizzling pan of bacon and eggs. He turned, seeing Remus and smiled,

“Thought you’d be hungry. You’re always hungry.”

“Yeah,” Remus nodded, yawning and scratching his head. “Cheers.”

Remus made the toast quickly, with his wand - he was getting back into the habit of using magic again now that his last ties to the muggle world had been cut.

They sat at the table in the living room, and Sirius even made an effort to use a knife and fork. Remus smiled at that, remembering James and Sirius’s impeccable pureblood table manners. *He will come back to me*, Remus told himself, as Sirius buttered his toast daintily, *bit by bit*.

The postcard from Grant was still sitting up on the mantelpiece. The image on the front was of Brighton Pavillion. “I’d better start boxing up the rest of his things,” Remus said, thinking out loud. “Find a way to get them to him.”

“He said he’d come back, when he was settled.” Sirius said, unexpectedly.

“Oh.” Remus blinked, “Did you talk, then?”

“A little bit,” Sirius shrugged, faking nonchalance, “Just to say goodbye. He told me to look after you.”

“Oh, I see.” Remus said, quietly. “Well, sorry about that. That wasn’t his place to say.”

He wanted very much to keep these two halves of his life separate.

“No, it was ok,” Sirius said. They were quiet for a bit, eating. And then... “When did it happen?” Sirius asked, back to his sharp abruptness.

“When did what happen?”

“You and him. How soon after... after I went to prison?”

Remus set down his fork. “Why are you asking me that?”

“I’m just trying to fill in the gaps - the stuff I missed.”

Something inside Remus grew hot and fierce.

“I don’t see what Grant has to do with any of it. Do you want a list of everyone I’ve shagged since you’ve been gone?”

Sirius breathed in, sharply, at that. “No, of course not.”

“Well, then. Leave him out of it. He’s gone now, that’s that.”

"I shouldn't have asked. I just thought..."

"I never cheated on you." Remus said, hardening his voice, "So you can stop wondering. I never, ever betrayed you. Even if you think I did."

Sirius frowned, and looked down at his food. "You *are* still angry about that, then."

"I don't want to be." Remus said. "I don't want to be, but I am. You thought I was a *spy*, Sirius! You thought I would try to hurt Lily and James - you thought I would try to hurt *you*."

"I was confused," Sirius said, his voice small, "Everything was such a mess, everything was so difficult, and no one knew anything, no one trusted anybody--"

"I remember." Remus snapped. "I was there. I still trusted my friends."

Sirius kept staring at his food, but Remus wasn't finished, this had to come out eventually, he knew how it felt to leave things unsaid.

"D'you know how stupid I was? D'you want to know how completely dense I was, in those last months? I thought you wanted to break up with me! I wanted to come back from the pack and see if we could make things up - it never crossed my mind that you thought I was a... I mean, fucking hell, Sirius. I loved you!"

"Remus..."

"I loved you, and you left me with *nothing*, do you understand? I had nothing except a lot of scars and a drinking habit. So don't start interrogating me about the bits of my life I've been able to put back together."

Remus stood up and paced, the last of the full moon still hot in his veins. He stood by the window. He wanted to smoke, but he'd learnt by now not to give in to those kinds of urges - the kind that felt good, but would probably kill you in the end. The kind of urges he got when Sirius was around.

"I'm sorry." Sirius's voice was still very small. He was hunched forward, his hair in his face. Pitiful.

Remus felt terrible, even though he knew he deserved an apology. He hadn't meant to be hurtful. *For fuck's sake*, Remus scolded himself, *why can't we ever get this right?*

"No, I'm sorry." He said, steadying his voice, remembering to be understanding. "I didn't mean to be so..."

"I understand. I swear, Moon--Remus, sorry - I swear, I thought about you every day. What you must think of me, what you must have heard... I was the stupid one, not you. I should have trusted you, I should have told you about Wormtail being made secret keeper - I mean, bloody hell, we should have made *you* secret keeper. Merlin, when I went to Godric's Hollow that night... I just *lost it*."

"I would have done the same." Remus sighed, "I'd have killed Wormtail. Sirius, I'm sorry too. I wish I hadn't believed them - I wish I'd tried to investigate, done something to help you. I was just such a state, I barely went out, I was never sober. That stuff's all my fault. ...And that's why I needed Grant."

Sirius nodded, forlorn, still sitting at the table. It was too much, the air was too thick.

“Here, are you finished?” Remus asked, needing a subject change, “I’ll do the washing up. Thanks for that, it was perfect.”

He cleared up the plates and took them through to the kitchen. He folded up the last of Sirius’s fried egg in a piece of toast and scoffed it - waste not want not. Sirius came in just as he was chewing,

“Same old Remus,” he snorted, “Finishing everyone’s food.”

“I know,” Remus laughed, slightly abashed, turning on the taps. “Grant used to call me the human refuse unit. Once he ordered a set meal for four from the takeaway downstairs, but got stuck on a work call, and by the time he came back I’d eaten the lot.”

Sirius took this anecdote pretty well. He came to stand beside Remus and took up a tea towel, so he could dry as Remus washed. They did this in companionable silence for a while, but Remus knew Sirius was building up to something. His body was giving off that agitated energy Remus recognised from long ago - were they going to have a fight again? He hoped not.

“How long was he here?” Sirius said, softly, “How long were you...”

“A long time.” Remus replied, concentrating on the dishes.

“It’s good that you had someone.” Sirius said, with remarkable humility. “I’m glad you weren’t alone.”

“He was better than I deserved.” Remus agreed, glancing at Sirius to check it was ok to continue. “I never thought I’d... I didn’t think I could ever love someone who wasn’t you. But I did. I loved him.”

Sirius opened his mouth, but seemed to think better of it, and closed it again. He nodded, a shadow of disappointment crossing his face. He was trying *so hard*. Remus put down the last dish, carefully, and wiped his hands dry on his jeans.

He turned back to face Sirius, who was watching him like a hawk.

“I loved him.” Remus said. “But he wasn’t you.”

Sirius’s eyes widened, hopefully. Remus gave him a small, shy smile, and a tiny shrug. Sirius leaned in, and all of a sudden they were inches apart, and then they were kissing, clutching each other tightly, as if it was their first and last.

It turned out you never really lost the knack. Like an unbroken spell, Remus felt every moment come flooding back to him as vividly as if it were yesterday; not the fights, or the war, or the emptiness, but the joy, the thrill of friendship, and the love - so, so much love; Remus felt as if he was being filled up with it; he was spilling over.

Just as it had been the very first time, Remus’s brain seemed to be yelling *yes, yes yes!* and he held onto Sirius with both hands, *you’re mine, you’re mine, you’re mine.*

When they broke apart, they were both grinning, pressing their foreheads together, holding each other’s shoulders as if they were fighting - or falling.

“I love you,” Sirius whispered, “I love you so much.” He squeezed his eyes shut, “Don’t worry, you don’t have to say it back.”

“Of course I love you, you idiot,” Remus gasped, not sure if he was laughing or crying, “I never stopped.”

Sirius laughed too, though his cheeks were wet, and kissed him again. And again, and again, and again.

They weren't teenagers anymore. They finished the washing up, and returned to the couch. Sirius suggested playing a record, instead of the TV, and Remus acquiesced, willing to give him anything he wanted. He selected Diamond Dogs, first, but Remus thought the lyrics to 'We are The Dead' might be too hard to hear. In the end it was Hunky Dory, which had happier tunes on it.

Sirius stretched out, his head in Remus's lap, and Remus stroked his hair and bent over to kiss him whenever he liked, because *he could, at last, he could*.

“I missed you.” He whispered.

Sirius squeezed his hand and turned his head, slightly, obviously not wanting Remus to see the emotion on his face. He cleared his throat, “Tell you what I've missed,” he said, a smile playing on his lips - that Sirius Black grin - “Smoking. Haven't got a fag, have you?”

“They're bad for you.” Remus tutted. “They kill you.”

“We're all dying,” Sirius replied.

“Maybe.” Remus agreed, lacing their fingers together, “But shouldn't life last longer, if it can be like this?”

* * *

They fell asleep on the couch, probably because they were both too shy to suggest moving to the bedroom. Remus awoke to birdsong in the early hours of the morning, still upright, stiff, hips aching, the warm weight of Padfoot in his lap. He scratched sleepily behind the dog's ear, pushing him away to get up and use the loo.

When he came back, Sirius was back to himself. “Sorry,” he said, “I keep turning in my sleep. I think I spent too long as a dog in Azkaban.”

“It's fine,” Remus smiled, “I don't mind at all.” He stretched, “What do we need to do today, is there anyone left on the list to talk to?”

“No, we've done everything,” Sirius said. “Except find a new headquarters. Hey, I had a thought about that - what about that old church you stayed in with the werewolves?”

“Oh, that... no, probably a bad idea. Greyback knows where it is.”

“He's still around, then.”

“Mm hmm. Tea?”

“Please.”

Remus went into the kitchen and Sirius followed him, still talking, “I just thought that would be good, because it's the middle of nowhere, so I can be there too. I hate the idea of you going off to meetings and me staying put.”

“Don't you like it here?” Remus raised an eyebrow. He loved his little flat, “Other than Hogwarts,

it's the only place I've ever really felt at home."

"Oh Remus." Sirius squeezed his arm, "You've gone all soft in your old age."

"Piss off." Remus snorted, giving him a light nudge with his elbow. "We didn't all grow up in mansions."

"No but-- hey! Hey, Remus, that's it!" Sirius was shaking his shoulder now, jogging Remus as he tried to pour the milk.

"Oi, watch it! What?"

"My mansion! Or it's mine now, anyway - my parents are both dead, I'm the Black heir! The house will answer to me!"

"Oh, I see," Remus frowned, turning to look at Sirius properly, "Are you sure? I mean... you really want to go back there?"

"Well, no, obviously I don't. But it's probably one of the most protected houses in Britain - the Blacks took home security really bloody seriously. There are enough rooms for all the Weasleys and then some - oh merlin, imagine my bitch mother's face if she knew I'd invited the Weasleys over to stay! It's something I can do to help, isn't it?"

"But Sirius, think about it, you'll be in the home your parents lived in - all their things will be there..."

"We'll chuck it all out," Sirius waved a hand, "And it's so safe - a safe place for Harry, Remus."

"It does sound..." Remus thought hard, coming around to the idea. "If you're *sure*?"

"Of course I am! And anyway, it won't be half as grim if I have you there with me, will it?"

"Ha," Remus poked him, "Now who's gone soft?"

They got in touch with Dumbledore via the fireplace, and even he sounded impressed with this idea. He wanted to know how to get in, what sort of charms and curses Sirius knew about, how soon he could alert the Order.

"We'll need to give the place a proper clean," Sirius said, eagerly, "It'll be full of junk, but I can help, if I'm going to be there all the time, and no one is better with magical pests than Remus!"

"An excellent idea, gentlemen," Dumbledore's eyes twinkled through the flames, "And right under Voldemort's nose - in the home of his most loyal supporters! How soon can you both get there?"

"Tomorrow," Remus said, quickly, because he knew Sirius had been about to say 'right now!' "We'll go after dark, so it's less suspicious."

"Good man, Lupin," Dumbledore said, "In that case I shall await word from you."

His face vanished in a puff of smoke.

"Yes, Moony! Sorry, Remus..." Sirius cheered. "Amazing! Let's pack!"

Of course, Sirius had barely anything *to* pack, and was much too excited to be sensible anyway. That was left up to Remus, who began making a list of all the things they would need - books of course, all the notes from the first war. Clothes, food, bedsheets - Remus didn't know how long

Grimmauld Place had stood empty, he wasn't sure if any of it would be salvageable.

"I can finally show you my bedroom!" Sirius trilled, "Ooh, teenage me would be so jealous, getting Remus Lupin in my bedroom!"

"Ha," Remus snorted, folding up robes and stuffing them into his trunk.

"And just wait until Harry arrives! We can sort out a room for him, and when the war's over, it'll be his..."

Remus smiled and kissed him and agreed it would all be lovely, it would be an adventure, because that was what Sirius needed from him just then. And he was determined to do everything Sirius needed for as long as he could.

"I can't wait to see Andromeda - and her kid! Must be in seventh year now, surely? Hey, imagine if she and Harry fall in love, how completely mental would that be? Then he'd be... what, my second cousin?"

"Once removed, or something like that," Remus acknowledged, "What are you talking about, anyway, they're almost a decade apart. We were thirteen when Andromeda had that kid."

"And Moody, the old codger, and Arthur, and Gideon and..."

"Sirius, no," Remus said, gently, "Remember, Gid and Fab died."

"Oh... oh yeah..." Sirius's face fell, and Remus felt dreadful. Perhaps he couldn't just go along with everything. He touched Sirius's hand, "It's ok, you're already remembering things much better than a few weeks ago."

"Maybe." Sirius said, uncertain. He rubbed his arm. "I think I'll go and have a rest, if that's ok?"

"Of course."

Remus finished all of the packing, and when he went back to the living room, Padfoot was curled up on the couch again.

They ate a light meal for dinner, and Remus had the TV on because it was his last night around all of his muggle comforts. They still decided to take all of their old records - though plenty had warped over time, and gave off an unpleasant hissing sound over the music. With everything packed away in trunks and boxes, it felt very final, to Remus. But perhaps that was just nerves.

He tried to stay calm, watching the sky outside turn a deeper shade of blue, the streetlights turning from pale pink to thick amber, and the stars beginning to show. Light pollution in London meant that stars were rare - you could only make out the very brightest ones.

Sirius's head was nodding against his shoulder already, as the tv announced the nine o'clock news. Remus yawned and flicked his wand at the screen, turning it off for the last time. "Oi," he whispered to Sirius, "Come on, let's go to bed."

"Mmph."

Remus had to shake him a bit, but finally Sirius staggered up and wandered zombie-like down the hall. Remus brushed his teeth and washed his face, then followed him in.

Sirius was standing beside the bed, biting his lip.

"Come on," Remus yawned, climbing under the covers, "What's wrong?"

"Um. Nothing." Sirius got in, slowly.

Remus pulled him close, so happy to have him near again. He wrapped his arms around Sirius's body and inhaled the scent of him, and buried his face in that beautiful hair. He felt so good. He felt complete. He kissed Sirius's cheek, searching for his mouth, "Love you."

"Love you too." Sirius returned, though he was very tense, and turned his head away.

"What's wrong?" Remus asked, pulling away, "Am I being too...?"

"No, I just..." Sirius pulled back too. "Sorry, I just don't think I can... you know, any more."

"Oh." Remus blinked, "Oh, Jesus, sorry, I didn't mean to... of course not, if you don't want to."

"No, I want to," Sirius squirmed, "I'm just not sure I can. Since Azkaban... um. There's not really been a lot 'going on', if you know what I mean. I might not... er. I just don't want you to think it's *you*."

"*Oh!*" Remus blinked again. He didn't really know what to say, or what to do. This was not a problem he'd ever encountered before. He wanted to be kind. "I'm just glad you're here," he said, truthfully. "I don't need anything else."

"Really?"

"*Really.*"

Sirius turned around, and took Remus's face in his hands, and kissed him, long and deep. That would have been enough; truly, honestly. Remus would have been happy with Sirius's lips, Sirius's taste and scent. But after a while, Sirius pulled back, and grinned,

"Doesn't mean I don't want you to try..."

And Remus just about dissolved.

It took a very long time. There had to be a lot more kissing, a lot more coaxing and gentle caresses and heated whispers; it took hours and hours. But how could Remus complain, when he finally had Sirius sighing in his arms again? It was so tender and so, so beautiful.

Afterwards they lay exhausted, and hot, and happy. Remus felt as if every hair on his body was singing; every nerve ending humming. Sirius curled into his body, and stroked his scars, like he used to.

"Hmmm."

"Hmmm."

"Remus?"

"Yes?"

"Can I ask you one question?"

"Oh," Remus smiled, "If you really must."

“What have you been doing all these years, Moon--sorry.”

“No, it’s ok. Call me Moony.”

“Moony.” he sighed, happily, “What have you been doing? When we called around everybody - they were as surprised to see you as me. They all said they hadn’t seen you for a long time.”

“Since the war.” Remus confirmed. “Since Lily and James.”

“Why?” Sirius asked, frowning.

“I couldn’t bear it.” Remus said, simply. “Being around anyone who knew what had happened. I’ve seen Mary once or twice, but no one else. I wanted to be alone.”

Sirius shook his head, looking frustrated. “I don’t understand you, Moony.”

“No,” Remus smiled softly, “No, you never did, quite.”

“Fair enough.” Sirius accepted.

He lay back onto Remus, with his whole weight - though that wasn’t much. It was pathetic, really. Two bony, wiry men, clinging together; both old before their time, and both so lost.

They had never understood each other, not really.

“You always tried, though.” Remus said, into Sirius’s hair. He wrapped an arm around him and kissed his head. “You still knew more than anyone else ever has. Ever will.”

“Even though I thought you were--”

“We don’t need to talk about that.”

Sirius gave half a sigh, and Remus knew he disapproved, but they’d done enough talking, for now. They were quiet for a long time, and Remus closed his eyes.

Finally, Sirius spoke.

“Even if we don’t talk about it, don’t you think we ought to try to forgive each other?”

“You sound like Dumbledore.” Remus snorted.

“Ha.” Sirius said. “Yeah, you’re right. Can you believe we’re back following orders from that old fool? I s’pose I don’t really know much about forgiveness.”

“Me neither.” Remus sighed.

“I don’t know if it’s worth anything, really, with lives as short as ours.” Sirius said, sadly, “I think at this point, there’s only love and hate.”

“That’s very fatalistic of you.” Remus commented, “I thought *I* was supposed to be the pessimist.”

Sirius shuddered slightly, which Remus took for a laugh. He squeezed him tighter, and kissed his shoulder. “Love and hate.” He murmured, thoughtfully.

“Love *or* hate, I s’pose.” Sirius clarified. “You make a choice.”

“It’s that simple, then?”

“Yeah. I think it is.” Sirius reached for his hand under the duvet. He looked up at Remus, eyes now icy grey, but as piercing as ever. He was asking a question.

Remus squeezed his hand in answer,

“Love.” He said.

And then he kissed him.

The End.

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is 'Till the End' by The Pogues.

Full fic playlist on Spotify:

https://open.spotify.com/user/htl2006/playlist/3z2NbLq2IVGG0NICBqsN2D?si=LiyI_JKJSx2RUqks3p50kg

Thank you so, so much for reading. Xxx

Really hate having to add this, but DO NOT COPY TO WATTPAD. Seriously, I don't want my writing there. Don't be a dick.

I am no reading or replying to comments on this fic.

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